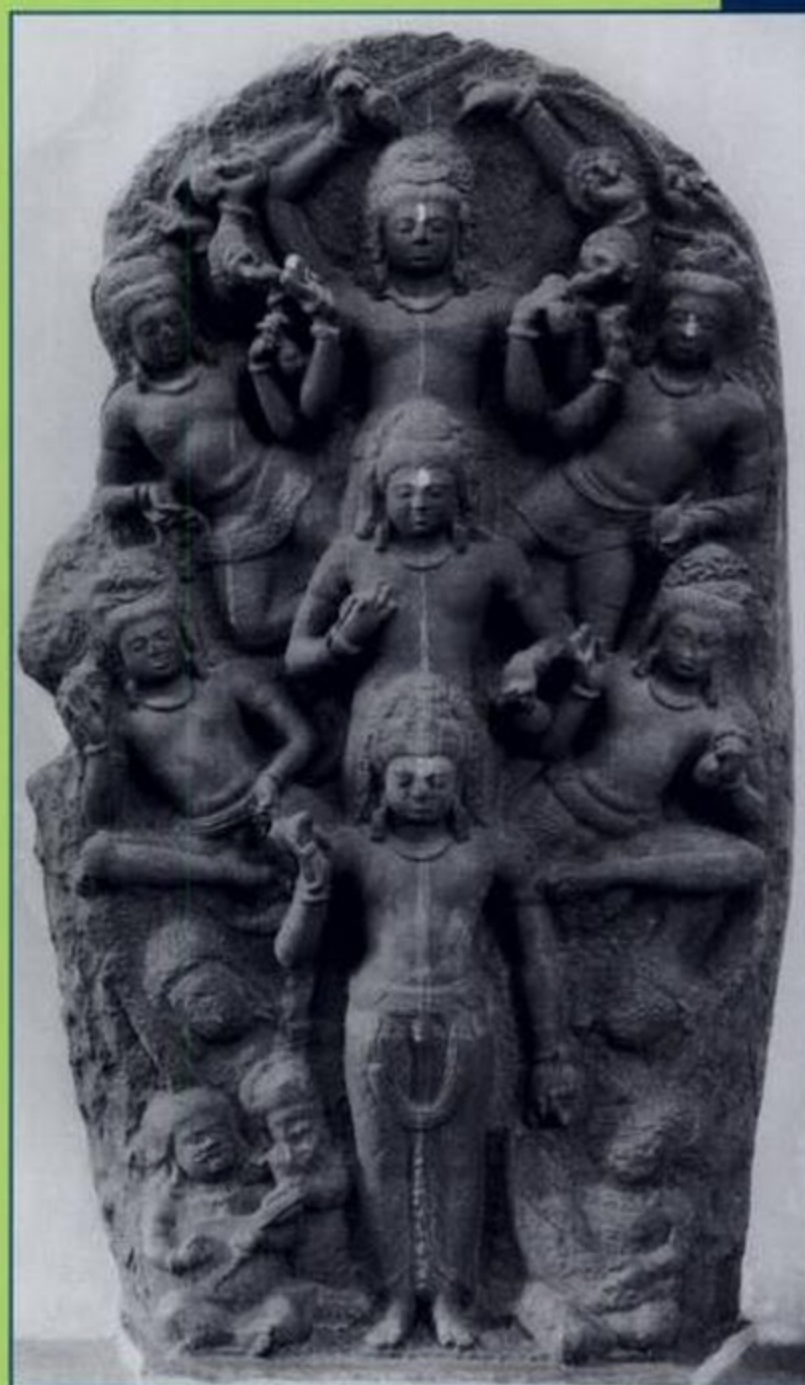


DORIS METH SRINIVASAN

MANY HEADS, ARMS AND EYES

Origin, Meaning
and Form of Multiplicity
in Indian Art



Studies in Asian Art and Archaeology

BRILL

MANY HEADS, ARMS AND EYES

ORIGIN, MEANING AND FORM OF MULTIPLICITY IN INDIAN ART

BY

DORIS METH SRINIVASAN



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PRINTED IN THE NETHERLANDS

TO HONOUR MY MOTHER

ANNI METH JOSEPHS
geb. Goldschmidt

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ABBREVIATIONS

| | |
|---------------------|---|
| Ait. Brāh. | Aitareya Brāhmaṇa |
| Āp. Ś.S. | Āpastambīya Śrauta Sūtra |
| AARP | Art and Archaeology Research Papers, London |
| AV | Atharva Veda Saṃhitā |
| AVP | Atharva Veda Saṃhitā, Paippalāda recension |
| AVŚ | Atharva Veda Saṃhitā, Śaunakīya recension |
| BĀU | Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad |
| Bh.G. | Bhagavad Gītā |
| BŚS | Baudhāyana Śrauta Sūtra |
| Go. Brāh. | Gopatha Brāhmaṇa |
| HOS | Harvard Oriental Series |
| IA | Indo-Aryan |
| IE | Indo-European |
| JA | Journal Asiatique |
| Jaim. Brāh. | Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa |
| JAOS | Journal of the American Oriental Society, New Haven |
| JISOA | Journal of the Indian Society of Oriental Art, Calcutta |
| JNSI | Journal of the Numismatics Society of India |
| JUPHS | Journal of the United Provinces Historical Society |
| KS; or Kauś. S. | Kauśika Sūtra |
| Mhbh. | Mahābhārata |
| MNU | Mahā Nārāyaṇa Upaniṣad |
| MS | Maitrāyaṇī Saṃhitā |
| MŚS | Mānava Śrauta Sūtra |
| MU | Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad |
| PB; or Pañc. Brāh. | Pañcaviṃśa Brāhmaṇa |
| Rāmāy. | Rāmāyaṇa |
| RV | Rig Veda Saṃhitā |
| Ṣaḍ. Brāh. | Ṣaḍviṃśa Brāhmaṇa |
| ŚB; or Śata. Brāh. | Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa |
| SBE | Sacred Books of the East |
| ŚU | Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad |
| SV | Sama Veda Saṃhitā |
| TB; or Taitt. Brāh. | Taittirīya Brāhmaṇa |
| TS | Taittirīya Saṃhitā |
| Taitt. Ār. | Taittirīya Āraṇyaka |
| ViDhP | Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa |
| VS | Vājasaneyi Saṃhitā |
| YV | Yajur Veda Saṃhitā |

PART ONE

MEANING. TEXTUAL STUDIES

CHAPTER ONE

THEORY

This is a lengthy book for just one theme and one question. The theme is an Indian iconographic convention I call the multiplicity convention. This designation refers to images adorned with multiple organs and limbs, the most characteristic ones being multiple eyes, arms and heads. The question is, "Why are the images portrayed in this manner in the Indian tradition and what meanings lie behind the portrayals?" Since the multiplicity convention occurs with images of the divine, the meanings are expected to be religious in nature. In searching for the religious significance of images having the multiplicity convention, the cultural aspects of a part of the Indian world¹ are investigated. Particularly, the artistic and religious traditions of India, and to some extent Pakistan and Afghanistan, are considered to the exclusion of cultural aspects farther afield.

Within these geographic boundaries, the book concentrates on the cultural, especially the artistic and religious developments during a specific period of time. The study is concerned with origins and it is the initial rise and development of the multiplicity convention which is under investigation. The periods wherein the multiplicity convention began and became fully established are from c. second century B.C. through the third century A.D. This is the timeframe emphasized in this book, although glances are thrown backward to the pre- and proto-historic periods and forward to the Gupta and post-Gupta periods. This is done to establish or verify contextual parameters for the main periods under investigation. Prehistoric and proto-historic cultural dimensions are likely to effect some forces accounting for the subsequent rise of the multiplicity convention. Therefore, the Indus material remains, and the literature referring to the cultural dynamics of the emerging territorial units (*janapadas*), together with their archaeological evidence, are not lost sight of. Artistic traditions immediately following our timeframe may very well validate, or invalidate, interpretations offered for earlier images; therefore Indian images from the fourth through the seventh or eighth century A.D. are introduced as further evidence.

The effect of setting these geographic and chronological limits on the subject is to whittle it down. If ever a theme needed whittling, it is surely that of multiple bodily parts in Indian art. The multiplicity convention is probably the most pervasive iconographic feature in Indian art, yet no prior iconological study on the full extent of the convention in any period or religious phase has been made. This is a convention extending and

¹ The phrase is used here as articulated in the French Indological tradition, where "le monde indien" comprises the cultural, linguistic, sociological, ethnographic, economic and political events of all cultures within the natural boundaries of the subcontinent, as well as the geographically peripheral cultures which were influenced by these events. Cf. Jean Filliozat, "Le Monde Indien," *Sciences*, No. 47, 1967, pp. 59-70.

proliferating luxuriantly. It is to be seen in Hindu, Buddhist, and to a lesser degree in Jain art. In addition to its wide usage, its complex usage is noteworthy. Even the casual observer of Indian art soon becomes aware that more deities appear with a greater number of heads, arms and (sometimes) legs in the art of the later periods than in the art of the earlier periods. This study purposefully limits the iconological investigations to the earlier periods in the belief that if an assessment of the religious significance of the convention is at all possible, a study of the convention prior to its extensive proliferation should be undertaken first.

A scan of the art of the Indian world, prior to the fourth century A.D., shows a discreet application of the multiplicity convention. This is the age wherein devotional icons of Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism developed. However, it is only with the Hindu deities that the iconographic convention may be found. The exclusive nature of the multiplicity convention largely focuses on the art of one city of this age, Mathurā.

Modern Mathurā is some 60 miles southwest of Delhi. During the first three hundred years of the Christian era, it was the southern center of the powerful Kuṣāṇa Empire.² Mathurā is an excellent polling ground to predict iconographic idiosyncrasies over greater India during these centuries. For the skilled artisans of Mathurā attracted Hindu, Buddhist and Jain patrons alike. In this way, Mathurā was the first artistic center to produce devotional icons for all the three faiths. Whereas among the Hindu icons the convention is, from the outset, a fully recognized iconographic possibility, in Buddhist and Jain deities it is entirely absent. A late Kuṣāṇa-early Gupta Jain image from Mathurā (Pl. 1.1a), demonstrates well the exclusiveness of the convention. In the center, a Jain Savior is depicted. To either side are Hindu gods cast in the role of attendant godlings.³ Both of these are depicted with four arms (Pl. 1.1b). Here, on a sacred Jain relief, the main object of worship is represented on the model of a "normal" personage, while those of lesser status are seen with the multiplicity convention. It is to be supposed that for the Mathurā craftsman and devotee alike, the convention is recognized as germane to the Hindu tradition alone.

The discreet application of the multiplicity convention in early Indian art provides a clue for a possible way to understand its significance. If only Hindu images have multiple bodily parts then it is possible that the Hindu textual tradition, preceding and contemporary with the images, may contain insights into its religious symbolism. The main body of religious sculptures under investigation arose prior to most of the Purāṇas, the Āgamas and the iconographic treatises. While all these works may shed considerable light on the symbolic significance of the convention – and for that reason they are used in the present study – a concern with origins cannot begin with them. The place to begin is with the

² For the numismatic evidence that the Great Kuṣāṇas and their successors, the later Kuṣāṇas, remained a dominant force in Mathurā longer than any of their other eastern India strongholds, see D.W. MacDowall, "The Pattern of the Kuṣāṇa Copper Coinage and the Role of Mathurā," in *Mathurā: The Cultural Heritage*, gen. ed. Doris Meth Srinivasan, New Delhi, 1989, pp. 153–161.

³ The gods are Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa and Saṃkarṣaṇa/Balarāma. This type of image is mentioned in Chapter 18. It is discussed in D.M. Srinivasan, "Vaiṣṇava Art and Iconography at Mathurā," in *Mathurā: The Cultural Heritage*, pp. 386–387.

ancient Hindu textual tradition, the Vedas and the Mahābhārata.⁴ It must be determined whether a literary development of the convention begins with these ancient Hindu texts since the convention itself begins with the earliest Hindu art. To anticipate what is laid out in detail in the subsequent Chapters, divine multiplicity is an established Vedic and epic phenomenon.

Beginning with the Rig Veda, the oldest text in the ancient Hindu tradition,⁵ divinities are attributed multiple bodily parts and forms. The attributes are sufficiently numerous and diagnostic to permit a general definition of the convention, several sub-definitions and a working hypothesis as to why divinities are described in this manner. The Rig Veda contains over seventy references to divine multiple bodily parts and forms. The evidence shows that the multiplicity convention is not only well recognized, but that it is employed in a fundamentally consistent way throughout the text. In the Rig Veda, a deity associated with the act of creation on a cosmic scale is denoted with multiple bodily parts and/or forms. The cosmic creator may act as the agent in effectuating creation. He may create the phenomenal world or the visible divine forms whereby he himself is apprehended in the world. Or he may, in a more passive manner, act as the material out of which the universe is made. In either case, active or passive, the divinity is denoted with multiple bodily parts and/or forms. Let me illustrate. Rudra, who is the Vedic forerunner of the Hindu god Śiva, is lauded in the Rig Veda as “Father of the World” (RV 6.49.10) and is endowed with formidable creative energy. In verse 9 of hymn 2.33, he is envisioned in the following way: “With steadfast limbs, having many forms, possessed of marvellous and impressive power, the tawny god adorned himself with brilliant gold. From the Lord of this World of many (forms), from Rudra, the lordly-power never leaves.” In another creation image contained in the Rig Veda, the universe is shaped out of the body of a gigantic cosmic Male called Puruṣa. Puruṣa, according to this theory, represents the raw material acted upon in order to effectuate creation. In the opening verse of Rig Vedic hymn 10.90 this is how Puruṣa is described: “A thousand-headed Puruṣa, thousand-eyed, thousand-footed, he having pervaded the earth on all sides, still extends ten fingers beyond it . . . Such is his greatness, greater indeed than this is Puruṣa. All creatures constitute but one-fourth of him: his three-quarters are immortal in heaven.” These two examples (plus the many more cited in this work), give strong indication that a deity associated with cosmic creation is attributed multiple bodily parts and/or forms.

Why? The Rig Veda envisions the birth of the universe as analogous to human birth through labour. In this view, the creator god creates the universe by emitting all forms which lie dormant in his middle. The part below his waist is considered more than a mere belly; it is a cavity, or better, a womb-chamber. Being thus pregnant with the forms of the phenomenal world until he is ready to give birth, the creator god is with multiple bodily parts and/or forms much like a mother is “with child.”

⁴ The Rāmāyaṇa has few references to multiple bodily parts and forms, and these are mainly standardized phrases, in a word, clichés, see Chapter XI.C.

⁵ In considering Vedic literature in this classificatory manner, I follow Louis Renou, *Hinduism*, New York 1961 p. 19. He writes, “. . . Vedism is considered the most ancient form of Hinduism.”

This biological view of cosmic creation is clearly seen in verses relating to the Rig Vedic god Tvaṣṭṛ. Rig Vedic hymns postulate different creator gods, one of whom is Tvaṣṭṛ. In the Rig Vedic hymn 10.10, there is a dialogue between the primeval twins, the male Yama and the female Yamī. She discloses (in verse 5) that "Already in the womb (*garbha*), the creator made us husband and wife, god Tvaṣṭṛ, the vivifier, being omniform." The womb from which the couple emerged belongs to Tvaṣṭṛ himself. The high probability that Tvaṣṭṛ has indeed a filled womb is supported by another hymn, this time in the Atharva Veda. AV 6.78 is for matrimonial happiness, and verse 3 says: "Tvaṣṭṛ generated the wife, Tvaṣṭṛ generated thee as husband for her; let Tvaṣṭṛ make for you two a thousand life-times, a long life-time." Tvaṣṭṛ continues, in the Yajur Veda, to eject forms. Therefore the Saṃhitās imply that Tvaṣṭṛ can generate forms and cause a life-span because he possesses life-forms in his womb, as it were. It is because he contains such forms (*rūpa*-s) within himself that he is called Viśvarūpa, "All-Formed," or, "Omniform" in the Rig Veda.

Cosmic parturition seems to be the underlying religious significance of divine multiple bodily parts and/or forms in the Rig Veda. Human biology, in other words, is at the root of certain imagery concerned with the structure of creator gods. There is a hymn in the Atharva Veda dealing with marriage ceremonies which bears this out. The bride is to enter the nuptial bed with a fertility blessing. The blessing describes her as "all-formed (*viśvarūpa*) with greatness and rich in future progeny. The only way to interpret this blessing is to recognize that Vedic man believed that the act of parturition involves the emission of forms somehow already present (? as seeds; ? as potentialities) in the womb. The intensification of this biological view of creation is at work in all the Saṃhitās, not only the Rig Veda. Of particular interest is that cosmic parturition can also apply to a non-anthropomorphic creative principle. This principle is called Tat (it is a neuter principle) in the Yajur Veda. Tat is described as a "storehouse" presumably of all the forms awaiting release. The idea of a neuter storehouse surpasses in its level of abstraction even the omniform Skambha (i.e. Cosmic Pillar or Prop) and the omniform Rohita (the Ascending Sun), formulated in the Atharva Veda, because these Atharvanic inventions still retain traces of anthropomorphism in their imagery.

The Brāhmaṇas build upon the conceptualization of the omniform gigantic Male, Puruṣa, in developing their major creator god, Prajāpati. Prajāpati is a huge omniform Male who has a womb, milk-giving breasts and periods of pregnancy, labour and post-partum exhaustion. There can be no doubt that the major progenitor of the Brāhmaṇas is an Omniform Motherly Male who epitomizes the biological view of creation since he is a Pregnant Male. Prajāpati desires to give birth (cf. ŚB 9.1, 6, 7); he desires to be many (Maitrāyaṇī Saṃhitā 4.2.1). He copulates with the Earth, Air, the Sun, the Sky and then his Mind copulates with the goddess Vāk, but it is *he* who becomes pregnant, time after time (see ŚB 6.1.2.1-11). So did Prajāpati, states the Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa, create the worlds. So also, it is clear, do the definitions isolated from the Rig Veda continue to apply. The image of the Pregnant Male is not pure poetic mythologizing; it is found to be the dominant rationale for the performance of an important ritual described in the Brāhmaṇas. Its name is Agnicayana.

One of the aims of the Agnicayana ritual is to refertilize Prajāpati after he has emptied his womb. We may say that one aim is to render Prajāpati again as the Pregnant Male. The ritual in effect reestablishes the multiform condition of Prajāpati. Because of the symbiotic relationship between Prajāpati and the main ritual altar, the goal can succeed. The seven layers of the main altar are equated with the bodily parts (*tanū*) and breaths of Prajāpati (see ŚB 8.7.4.19–21). Of particular interest is that the second layer reconstructs that part of Prajāpati which is below the waist and above the feet. The bricks reconstructing his “middle” are understood to be the creatures who went out from his middle, the womb (see ŚB 8.2.2.6). With the completion of the second layer of the altar, the womb of Prajāpati has been built with all the new body forms locked in place. Renewal of the omniform condition for Prajāpati has been achieved. Thanks to the efficacy of the Agnicayana, Prajāpati is once again the Pregnant Male.

The Upaniṣads do not focus on the omniform Pregnant Male. Why would they? Cosmic creation, when it is considered, is the result of innate potentialities belonging to a neuter First Principle, Brahman. However, even Brahman is influenced by the theory that creation is conception. Brahman *IS* the womb (*yoni*), the source, the ultimate storehouse of all life. Utterly transcending any conceptual links with the phenomenal or the anthropomorphic, Brahman is devoid of multiple bodily parts or forms to symbolize the creative nature of the source. Instead, the image is of Brahman as the womb that is full. The Bṛhad Āraṇyaka Upaniṣad says it best: Brahman is “the fullness beyond” (5.1.1). The first evolute from the transcendental or higher Brahman is the immanent or lower Brahman, characterized, in the same Upaniṣad as “the fullness here.” But the extraordinary image of the gigantic Pregnant Male could not have been entirely forgotten. As soon as it is a question of giving structure to the theistic conceptualization of the First Principle, the image reasserts itself. That is to say, Rudra-Śiva, the great god of the Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad, may be understood as the Plenum when he is the transcendental Brahman; he may also be considered as an omniform Pregnant Male (cf. ŚU 3.4; 4.4) when he is identified as the theistic embodiment of the lower Brahman. The same may be said for Nārāyaṇa, the Vedic cosmic god who becomes a significant component in the development of Hinduistic Viṣṇu. Nārāyaṇa was certainly a great god in his own right during the periods when Brahmanism dominated. The Mahā Nārāyaṇa Upaniṣad takes its name from the fact; moreover, in this text, Mahā Nārāyaṇa is the embodied or lower form of Brahman. Brahman is the source or womb of Nārāyaṇa, who inherits the omniform condition of Puruṣa-Prajāpati.

Cosmic parturition is an influencing factor in the Mahābhārata, but the situation becomes more complex; the multiplicity imagery in the epic may also respond to symbolism outside of the Vedic heritage. A new influencing factor is the Sāṃkhya system of thought. As a result, cosmic parturition and the image of the omniform Pregnant Male underlie some of the *vaiṣṇavite* and *śaivite* descriptions of multiple bodily parts, but certainly not all. For example, the theistic lower form of Brahman is adjusted to the Sāṃkhya notion of the eightfold Prakṛti, or unevolved Material Nature, which may in turn be expressed by a deity with eight multiple bodily parts. In this way the *vaiṣṇava* Absolute in the Bhagavad Gītā reflects two speculative viewpoints which translate into two distinctly

different multiplicity conceptualizations. God's higher form equates with the Viśvarūpa form and his lower form is his eightfold Prakṛti nature. So also does Śiva in the epic combine Vedic and non-Vedic symbolism in his multiplicity imagery. Śiva's names lay claim to the Puruṣa legacy with "Sahasrapād" (Thousand-footed), "Sahasramūrdhan" (Thousand-headed), "Sahasrabāhu" (Thousand-armed), Sarvāṅga (All-limbed), recited in the Sahasranāmastotra of the Anuśāsana Parvan. Nor is the imagery of the Pregnant Male forgotten as Śiva's epithet Mahāgarbha, in the same stotra, makes clear. In addition, Śiva's Viśvarūpa nature and his eightfold Material Nature show how closely his multiplicity symbolism relates to both the biological view and the Sāṃkhya view of creation. Even though the multiplicity convention now is loaded with symbolism stemming from several sources, the reason for its application continues to conform to the definitions extracted from the earliest evidence in the Rīg Veda.

Now you may well ask, "If the notion of cosmic parturition and the image of the Pregnant Male are so fundamental to the significance of the multiplicity convention, why is it that early Indian art uses the multiplicity convention but does not give substantive shape to either a Pregnant Male nor to a Birth-giving Male?." Here I must ask you to take a closer look, for it does. The notion of the Pregnant Male becomes allied to the belief that the embodied lower form of Brahman is an apparition (*yakṣa*) of the transcendental higher Brahman. That apparition, or Yakṣa, may appear on earth in forms that seem to be pregnant or that give forth fruit. Such devotional forms are analyzed in the second part of this work dealing with icons.

Again, you may, or ought, to ask, "How does the literary image of a creator god whose womb contains life-forms relate to the artistic image of numerous limbs or organs sprouting outside of a god's body?" First of all, it will be seen that in the case of *śaiva* images, multiple parts may unfold into multiple forms. That is, the multiple heads emanating from the Liṅga, are but the beginning of a process terminating only when the body (or, bodies) of god is fully revealed. This process is not evident with *vaiṣṇava* images, so an inquiry into the possible connection between outer limbs and inner forms still needs to be addressed. An Upaniṣadic simile seems to catch hold of the connection. The simile in the Aitareya Upaniṣad indicates that the fetus inside a woman's womb is like a limb of her own. The fetus is Ātman (equated with Brahman); thus the simile is likely to reflect influential though experimental thoughts of the time. The aim of the simile is to explain by way of analogy, the birth of Ātman. An analogous explanation is made between begetting a child and the birth of Ātman, the creative principle in this Upaniṣad. The comparison between the inner form and the outer limb rests on their both being intrinsic growths dependent upon the same host body. Therefore the explanation implies that presence of an outer limb (or limbs) signals the presence of an inner form (or forms) in the womb. On some level, this implication is allied to the Atharva Veda's understanding that the female reproductive system is intrinsically *viśvarūpa*. Catching hold of literary threads which are woven into later iconographic patterns is the charter for the first part of the book. So, this part is more concerned with the literary antecedents of the multiplicity convention than it is with the actual images and the environment which fostered them.

If the above statement of purpose and procedure sounds plausible, even logical, it deceives. The statement is based on a set of theoretical propositions which should be laid out and justified.

The geographical and chronological confines, within which the study proceeds, tacitly assume that both the significance and the rationale for the convention can be explained by recourse to the Indo-Aryan culture, and that the convention is therefore not critically related to currents elsewhere. Certainly this assumption needs to be justified.

The arts of other cultures in antiquity do, of course, show deities with multiple bodily parts, but the occurrences differ in various ways from the phenomenon in Indian art. Ancient Greece and Rome offer numerous examples.⁶ Janus, the Roman god of beginnings, is represented with two heads looking in opposite directions. The Greek Hecate, a goddess having strong connections with the underworld, ghosts and magic, has either three heads and three bodies in later representations, or, three heads emerging from one body with six arms. Her daughter is the hundred-headed Scylla. Heracles in one of his labours steals the cattle of Geryon, a three-headed, triple bodied giant. The gigantic hero Aigaion-Briareos, in the *Iliad*, uses his hundred arms to protect Zeus against the uprising of Hera, Poseidon and Pallas Athene. In the ancient Near East, on cylinder seals of the Akkadian period, Usmu (Usumia), a two-headed divine minister of the water god Ea is depicted. And in the art of the Neo-Babylonian period, the image of the bicephalic minor deity Usmu reoccurs. Plurality of eyes is not an unusual attribute of gods in ancient Greece, Egypt, Iran, and occurrences of multiple eyes can also be found in the Bible.⁷ However, nowhere is the multiplicity convention used with the degree of emphasis, proliferation and duration as it is in Indian art. The deities of other ancient cultures are usually not major gods in their respective religious contexts. Not so in India. The Hindu deities consistently associated with the multiplicity convention in the early art are the major gods of the main sects within Hinduism: Śiva, the *vaiṣṇava* god Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa, and the Goddess or Devī.

It must also be registered that the multiplicity convention is deeply in tune with the ways of conceptualizing in Hinduism. It is not a mental mutation grown wild. There are other areas in Hinduism where a multiplex notion is used – and needed. For one, multiplicity is a characteristic feature in Hindu mythology. A mythic cycle pertaining to one god may have multiple versions aggregating around some core action which identifies the myth. The myth of Dakṣa's sacrifice in the *śaiva* cycle can illustrate this point. It has these recognizable core elements: Dakṣa initiates a sacrifice but does not invite Śiva; Śiva's consort is offended at this slight; Śiva destroys the sacrifice and threatens the existence of Dakṣa; Śiva obtains a share of the sacrifice.⁸ Disbarment from a sacrifice is a

⁶ Since anthropomorphic multiform images are our main concern, the classical world's theriomorphic images such as Cerberus and Hydra need not be emphasized.

⁷ See the interesting paper, dated in parts, by Raffaele Pettazzoni, "Le Corps Parsemé d'Yeux," *Zalmoxis – revue des Études Religieuses* I, Paris, 1938, 3–12.

⁸ On these motifs, their multiforms and interpretations, see W.D. O'Flaherty, *Asceticism and Eroticism in the Mythology of Śiva*, Oxford Univ. Press, Delhi, 1975, pp. 30–31; and themes 38 a and c. Cf. Stella Kramrisch, *The Presence of Śiva*, Princeton, 1981, pp. 322–340.

theme with a lineage. Rudra was excluded from the sacrifice (see ŚB 1.7.3.1ff.; Ait. Brāh. 3.34), and so was Indra (see TS 2.5.1.2).⁹ In the Purāṇas, there are numerous multiforms of the myth on Dakṣa's sacrifice.¹⁰ Even later, there occur variations; Śaṅkara who is considered a manifestation of Śiva, is barred from the funeral rites of his mother on the grounds that he has no authority over Vedic rites.¹¹ Multiple versions of the offended consort also occur.¹² In the Purāṇas, it may be Satī in one age (Kūrma Purāṇa 1.13.57–60), and Umā-Pārvatī in another (1.14.43; 71; see also 1.13.60 and Śiva Purāṇa 2.2.6–7; Śiva Vāyavīya 1.18.4–59).

This illustration of a mythic multiform contains another, if not several other examples of multiplex notions in Hinduism. Multiple versions of a myth are facilitated by the idea that there exist multiple aspects or manifestations of a godhead. For example, Pārvatī, Satī, Umā appearing in the multiforms of the myth on Dakṣa's sacrifice are all different manifestations of the same Goddess, the Devī. There also exist multiple *avatāras* or incarnations of the god Viṣṇu. These can engage in multiple versions of what may be seen as the development of a mythic motif.¹³

The Indian capacity to acknowledge multiple forms of one godhead is rather unique among ancient religions. For example, the Devī's multiple aspectual forms mentioned above (plus the many more that could be cited) could be superficially compared with the several ladies on Mount Olympus. Hera and Aphrodite represent woman as mother and beloved, respectively; Artemis and Athena symbolize the virgin and the intellectual. "It may fairly be said that these four women signalize the four aspects of all womanhood."¹⁴ But – it should be noted – they are not multiple forms of Divine Woman, as is the case in Hinduism.

The ability of multiforms to act in multiple versions of a myth is assisted by the concept of the multiplicity of time. All three religions originating in India agree that time is cyclic, not linear.¹⁵ In Hinduism that means that a god can perform different feats in different ages in particular forms congenial to that age and the nature of the task. Different divine manifestations are not unrelated because they occur at different times. They are related to each other as each form is but a projection from god's transcendental essence which is changeless and timeless. Past actions of the gods can reoccur under various guises. To show the lines of continuity, there are the sages who remember past feats and proffer them as analogous models or lessons from which the present can learn.

⁹ See also Chapter 5, p. 50 for this theme. Cf. Kramrisch, *Presence*, p. 326.

¹⁰ E.g. see O'Flaherty, *Śiva*, pp. 128–130.

¹¹ Wendy Doniger O'Flaherty, *The Origins of Evil in Hindu Mythology*, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1976, p. 273.

¹² On this subject note what Sutherland has to say regarding the character of Draupadī in the Mahābhārata. Sally J. Sutherland, "Sītā and Draupadī: Aggressive Behavior and Female Role Models in Sanskrit Epics" *JAOS*, 109.1, 1989, 63ff., esp. 71.

¹³ Note for example the development of the dwarf, fish, boar motifs in Wendy Doniger O'Flaherty, *Hindu Myths*, Penguin Books, 1975, pp. 175–197. See Matsya Purāṇa 244–246 (Vāmana); 247–248 (Varāha); Bhāgavata Purāṇa 8.24 (Matsya).

¹⁴ Bruno Snell, *Discovery of the Mind*, trans. by T.G. Rosenmeyer, New York and Evanston, 1960, p. 40.

¹⁵ For an illuminary summary on this concept, see W. Norman Brown, *Man in the Universe*, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1966, pp. 68–87.

As a sage recalls past actions, the account may contain many names and epithets evocative of the deeds and powers of the god. Take the following example. It is an account, given by the epic sage Vaiśampāyana, of Kṛṣṇa's mission to Hastinapura to negotiate a peace between the Pandavas and the Kauravas, whose leader is King Duryodhana:

The Dāsārha drew near, and the famous Dhārtarāṣṭra rose up with his councilors, welcoming Madhusūdana. Keśava Vārṣṇeya met with the Dhārtarāṣṭra and his councilors, and with the kings who were present there, according to their seniority. Then Acyuta seated himself on a finely ornamented golden couch that was spread with all kinds of coverlets. The Kaurava, after presenting him with the cow and the honey dish, thereupon offered him his house and realm. All the Kurus and the kings offered their services to Govinda, who sat with the luster of a tranquil sun. King Duryodhana now invited the Vārṣṇeya, greatest of victors, to share a meal, but Keśava declined.¹⁶

Most students of Hinduism will not miss the absence of the name "Kṛṣṇa" in this account for they will, almost automatically, register the multiplicity of names and epithets in this passages as all belonging only to Kṛṣṇa (i.e. Dāsārha, Madhusūdana, Keśava Vārṣṇeya, Acyuta, Govinda, Vārṣṇeya, Keśava). This is yet another multiplex working in Hinduism, and it may be used in conjunction with the aforesaid examples. Multiple names can coordinate with multiple forms and/or multiple time to telescope the various forms, functions, exploits, lineages refracted through the ages into a cohesive image of the divine "personality."

There are some scholarly observers of the Hindu world who would go so far as to consider India's personality as "the very exemplar of cultural multiplicity."¹⁷ Equating "multiplicity" with "diversity" – which is not quite the way it is used above – Diana Eck recognizes "multiplicity" in racial stock, languages, philosophies, social groups and polycentric family systems.¹⁸

There are scholars who would consign the usage and significance of multiple bodily parts in Indian art to one or more of these multiplex notions. Coomaraswamy, in an intuitive gesture, suggests that such images may render in artistic terms the compound nature (i.e. *upadhi*-) of the cosmic divine which is "able by a division of *upadhis*, to function in many places at one time."¹⁹ Heimo Rao is one of the most recent proponents of the belief that multiple heads and hands are provided to carry the attributes relating to the god's multifaceted nature and mythic actions.²⁰ In a similar vein, O'Flaherty believes that "at least one of the purposes of the many heads and arms depicted on Hindu iconographic figures is to signify multiple powers and possibilities of divine action."²¹ The idea that multiple limbs could represent a series of staggered movements taken to accomplish a divine act was argued by Paul Mus. The artistic intent, according to this argument, is

¹⁶ Mhbh. 5.89.6–11. Translated by J.A.B. van Buitenen, *The Mahābhārata*, Books 4 and 5. Chicago and London, 1978, pp. 372–373.

¹⁷ Diana L. Eck, *Darśan, Seeing the Divine Image in India*, Chambersburg, 1981, p. 17.

¹⁸ Eck, *Darśan*, pp. 17–18.

¹⁹ A.K. Coomaraswamy, *The Dance of Śiva*, New York, 1957, p. 83.

²⁰ *Reflections on Indian Art*, Bombay, 1976, pp. 12–22.

²¹ O'Flaherty, *Evil*, p. 376.

to convey the dynamic flow of movement within the sculptural format which is static.²² A.A. Macdonell theorized that additional hands of Hindu icons were introduced in order to hold the attributes by which the worshipper could identify the god.²³

A.M. Hocart raised objections to Macdonell's theory and in the course of his provocative essay, written in 1929, he made several observations which should not have been forgotten in subsequent discussions.²⁴ Identification by means of adding arms with attributes had little merit for Hocart; there are other ways, he believed, for providing clues on the identity of a god (e.g. on the pedestal). He also stated that there are representations where the extra arms are not holding any attributes (e.g. the Deogarh's Viṣṇu Anantaśayana, whom he called "Nārāyaṇa, Pl. 1.2), or where the arms are not in contact with the attributes. Hocart astutely distinguished between earlier and later multi-armed representations. Having the Deogarh image in mind, he observed that the extra hands "are not wanted for any particular action and could easily have held attributes. . . . Indeed, on reviewing the history of Hindu sculpture, one gains the impression that the obligatory bearing of attributes is late. In the earlier sculpture the arms are performing all kinds of actions with empty hands or with weapons that are not distinctive. . . ."²⁵

Hocart put his finger on the main difficulty with the other explanations. They are based on evidence subsequent to the early iconographic developments. It is true that Hindu icons showing the multiplicity convention and dating from the late Gupta period onwards mainly represent mythic actions described in the Purāṇas and the Āgamas. This fact, together with the appealing purāṇic myth on the origin of the multi-armed Devī, can, it is easy to see, nurture the idea that multiple limbs, holding multiple powerful attributes are needed by the deity to engage in one or multiple mythic labours. The Devīmāhātmya in the Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa relates how the energies of all the gods united in order to create a divine form capable of defeating Mahiṣa, the buffalo-demon. They created the goddess Mahiṣāsuramardīnī, and each god gave the multi-armed goddess his own weapon to empower her in the battle against Mahiṣa.²⁶ This myth is often repeated when the theme of multiple bodily parts and their significance is broached. But to start the search for the significance with the purāṇic myths and post-Gupta Hindu images is to begin the search in mid-stream. The initial images and earlier texts tell a very different story, because – in point of fact – they usually do not tell a story. Those early Hindu images which display multiple bodily parts usually do not represent a *līlā*, a divine play or labour undertaken by god for the sake of his worshippers. Hindu temple images from the late-Gupta period onward usually do.²⁷ That is an important distinction. The chronological zones into which the multiplicity convention is divided and analyzed in this book are prompted by this distinction.

If I had to distinguish between the main general characteristics marking early and later

²² Paul Mus, "Un Cinéma Solide" *Arts Asiatiques* X, 1964, 21–32.

²³ "The Development of Early Hindu Iconography" *Festschrift für Ernst Windisch*, Leipzig, 1914, 158–169.

²⁴ "Many-armed Gods," *Acta Orientalia*, Vol. 7, 1929, 91–96.

²⁵ Hocart, "Many-armed Gods," 92.

²⁶ Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa; Devīmāhātmya 79.1–70.

²⁷ That is, more Hindu images represent narrative themes, although non-narrative images continue.

Hindu images endowed with the multiplicity convention, I would say that the latter relate mainly to *līlā* and the former relate mainly to *veda*, that is, theological knowledge. Pre-Gupta Hindu images, regardless of sect, betray a great desire to gain knowledge (*veda*) of the nature of the godhead. Therefore I view these early representations, in the main, as theological statements. The grandeur of the cosmic creator, his extraordinary powers, the unfathomable mystery of creating many from the One, including the unfolding of the One into multifaceted divine aspects that appear on earth, these are the great themes of early Hindu art. They are the concretization of inquiries pursued in the Vedas, and to some extent, the Mahābhārata. Such theological concerns are, of course expressed in the art of the subsequent periods. However, the emphasis shifts. More images represent the terror and bliss of god's *līlās* than the knowledge, *veda*, of god's nature. From the point of view of methodology, it is important to recognize this shift. It can effect the symbolism associated with the multiplicity convention.

To illustrate this point, I will summarize the shifting positions in the texts regarding the significance of Śiva's multiple heads, or *mukha*-s. There is no story or myth in Vedic literature to provide a cogent rationale for Śiva's five heads (or faces), especially the five faces associated with his cognizance, the *linga*, or phallus.²⁸ Nonetheless, the meaning and origin of the five "mukhas" can be established by surveying the term *mukha* and its usage in the Agnicayana, a ritual having *raudraic* overtones. Such a survey indicates that in the process of self-manifestation initiated by god, his five heads emerge first. The five "mukhas" (i.e. *pañcamukha*) of god appear before the rest of his body becomes manifest. The heads are fivefold to announce that the manifestation can be considered the connective link between the physical and metaphysical realms. That symbolism rests in the values associated with the number "five" in the Vedas. The plastic forms relating to the emerging *pañcamukhas* are quite rare; the few that are known are discussed in Chapter 11.C and Chapters 17 and 19. Despite its rarity, the theological position was retained. It is well known that a figure in the round of a four-faced Śiva, or, a figure in relief of a three-faced Śiva refer to the theological position inhering in the five-faced Śiva. This knowledge is predicated on the religious belief that the fifth or highest face can only be seen by the spiritually developed *śaivite* adept and not by the lay worshipper. There is a story in the Skanda Purāṇa however which does not recognize this theological position at all.²⁹ It is a delightful story on the origin of Śiva's four faces which has nothing to do with *veda*, and has everything to do with *līlā*. The Purāṇa recounts the episode of the beautiful Tilottamā, whose tale is already mentioned in the Mahābhārata.³⁰ Brahmā creates Tilottamā and sends her to Kailāsa to bow before Śiva. As she approached and circumambulated Śiva, the god sprouted a head in each of the four directions to keep her in view. Another example of a shift in meaning, under the influence of the shift from *veda* to *līlā*, concerns the significance of Śiva's third eye. The shift, from the ascetic to the

²⁸ The significance of the five heads of Śiva is a major topic in the book; see the Index under Five, mukha, Pañcamukha Liṅga, Agnicayana.

²⁹ Skanda Purāṇa 6.153.2-27.

³⁰ Cf. Mhbh. 1.203-26; 13.128.1-6.

ascetic-cum-erotic symbolism, is considered in Chapter 12. Of course, the whole notion of shifting positions for Śiva presupposes a continuous development in the formation of this god. The theoretical underpinnings establishing that Hinduistic Śiva developed mainly from (ancient Hindu, or) Vedic Rudra is presented in Chapter 5. Herein documentation is given to show that Rudra-Śiva is an "insider" to powerful and critical aspects of the Vedic religion.

In saying that I consider the early images to be mainly theological statements, it is my purpose also to stress that the ensuing analysis is from the point of view of cosmology and not *bhakti*. This is a study of what the image tells us about the origin and structure of divinity in the cosmic unfolding process; it is not a study about the icon and its use in worship by god's devotee, or *bhakta*. It is recognized that the images analyzed in this book were used in the praxis of *yoga* and/or *bhakti*. These are the two prevailing Hindu praxes requiring the presence of the objectified divine in order to carry out segments of the praxis. In yogic concentration (*dhāraṇa*), the mind can be fixed on an object either outside of, or part of, the practitioner. A form of god can be meditated upon and such meditation can lead the worshipper to salvation.³¹ In the *pūjā* ceremonies performed by a *bhakta*, the objectified divine is not only a tool to harness the mind in concentration. It is a form that is cherished since it permits the devotee to develop a close, loving relationship with his chosen deity. In both praxes, worship proceeds on the assumption that the object contains the presence of god. The consecrated image, containing the presence of god, represents the last stage in the unfolding process of the deity. The process is a progression beginning from the Transcendental which is formless. A series of progressions terminate with the visible manifestation of god on earth. A particular image, or *mūrti*, represents god's visible manifestation. Into a *mūrti*, god's presence is called. For a worshipper the progression leading to salvation goes in the opposite direction. It begins with the gross form of god in the consecrated image and ends with a realization of the Transcendental which is formless. In order to keep these distinctions, and orientations, quite clear I have used throughout the word "icon" when the discussion relates to the worshipful image, especially in a ritual context. Quite possibly, a good Sanskrit equivalent for the word "icon" is *vigraha*, applied to icons in India. The term means "to get hold of" and emphasizes, to my mind, the relationship between the worshipper and the objectified form used as a tool to grasp god. However, when in this book, the discussion is on the analysis of a god's physical form, relating to cosmological considerations and unrelated to devotional considerations, I use the word "image" or *mūrti*. *Mūrti* is a term already used in the early texts to signify "a material form" which evolves from an ulterior imperceptible source.³²

³¹ Cf. Gerhard Oberhammer, *Strukturen Yogischer Meditation*, Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften. Philosophisch-Historische Klasse. Sitzungsberichte. Band 322, Wien, 1977, pp. 122; 162; 217ff.

³² Chapter 9, ŚU 1.13. To judge from a fine essay by D.C. Bhattacharyya, *mūrti* continues to keep this denotation through the ages. The author ferrets out the distinctions between *mūrti* and *pratimā* in Indian texts. He concludes that *mūrti* is a "representation of a physical form," "the objective representation," "... the devotional psyche of the viewer is the determinant that transforms a *mūrti* into a *pratimā*." D.C. Bhattacharyya, "Murti and Pratima," *Rupānjali*, 1986, pp. 43-48.

To summarize, a basic theoretical proposition of this work is that the significance of the multiplicity convention can best be elucidated if the study commences with early Hindu images and looks primarily to the early, or ancient, Hindu textual tradition for possible decodification of the symbols. This proposition does not presume that all symbolic patterns are forthcoming only from the Vedas and the epic. Nor does the proposition assume that this body of literature is untouched by other religious traditions. Nor does it propose that knowledge of some idea in a culture need necessarily equate with the (relative) date of the text wherein the idea, or term is first found. Throughout the first part of the study, the need to navigate interpretations so that they avoid both the tyranny of texts and unsupported hypotheses is keenly felt and hopefully fulfilled.

The Table of Contents of this volume could suggest that both the author and the subject have nevertheless been extensively tyrannized. It is true that the symbolic interpretations presented in this book are based heavily on the ancient Hindu textual tradition. The limited use of coinage is explained in Chapter 19. The reasons for not using other contemporary religious textual traditions are as follows:

1. In early Indian art, (i.e. the art through the 5th century A.D.), the multiplicity convention appears only on Hindu images.
2. The earliest text in the Hindu textual tradition, the Rig Veda, proves that the convention is a Hinduistic phenomenon; the text employs the convention with enough internal consistency to warrant a basic set of definitions of the convention and a basic hypothesis as to its origin.
3. The hypothesis understands that cosmic parturition and a series of biological symbols give rise to the multiplicity convention. The notion that creation is conception continues, and involves the multiplicity convention throughout the ancient Hindu textual tradition.
4. The definitions and hypothesis derived from the early Hindu textual tradition can well explain why neither a Jain Tīrthaṅkara or Śākyamuni Buddha would be represented with the multiplicity convention in the early art; the explanation is outlined in the Epilogue.
5. Since indeed neither Jain or Buddhist images feature this convention in the early art, there is no urgency, in a study devoted to origins, to investigate segments of the Buddhist or Jain canons.
6. Finally, it has just been demonstrated that the earliest Buddhist iconometrical texts "basically belong . . . to the Brahmanical sphere," because the Buddhists "had no art traditions of their own" and therefore "they had to depend on the craftsmen who were rooted in the common Indian traditions of arts and crafts of their time."³³

³³ Gustav Roth, "Notes on the Citralakṣaṇa" *South Asian Archaeology 1987*, Rome 1990, p. 1021. Roth's philological analysis of the *Citralakṣaṇa* indicates that it is a compilation of circa the 5th century A.D. and that it includes much earlier traditions. He proposes that the *Pratimā-māna-lakṣaṇam* also belongs to the Brāhmaṇical sphere.

Even though this investigation relies largely on the ancient Hindu textual tradition, it is recognized that it is not a "pure" monolithic entity untouched by non-Aryan or non-Vedic thought. Indeed, the earliest Sanskrit forms exhibit phonological and lexical loans from the Dravidian, and provide evidence that "Indo-Aryan and Dravidian speakers must have been in contact with each other for sometime before the composition of the *R̥gveda*."³⁴ After its composition, a second period of contact may be postulated when groups of Aryanized Dravidians and others had formed; they left their traces on the linguistic features (i.e. grammatical and phonological features) in the later literature.³⁵ These linguistic phenomena should alert us to the possibility that non-Aryan beliefs are also represented in the early texts.³⁶ Even though the Vedic texts cannot be considered as representing solely Vedic views, they can be considered, I believe, as representing a synthesis of religious thought current in the subcontinent wherein the dominant synthesizing force was the Indo-Aryan one.

However, the literature upon which this investigation depends can have critical gaps in areas where Hindu art exhibits the multiplicity convention and that presents a problem. A serious gap in information surrounds the figure of the warrior goddess, *Mahiṣāsura-mardini* who kills the buffalo-demon. She is a very popular deity in Mathurā where about thirty-four images of the goddess are found that date to the Kuṣāṇa period. She seems therefore to have had a sizable cult following in this town (and to a lesser extent in other towns) of northern India. Most often she is shown in combat with *Mahiṣa*. The reliefs nearly always depict the goddess with multiple arms holding weapons and attributes of victory. Her fight with the demon would seem to be an important element in her cult icons of this period. Yet, there are no satisfactory references in the Vedas or the *Mahābhārata* to explain this goddess, her feat, her multiple arms and her attributes. Nor is there any mention, in the texts I examined, of the name "*Mahiṣāsura-mardini*," or of a combat between a goddess and *Mahiṣa*, or of a goddess and a buffalo-demon, or even of a multi-armed form of the *Devī*. Must we then begin the interpretation of the Kuṣāṇa images with the first account of the goddess's combat in the *Devīmāhātmya*? The text probably belongs to the Gupta age, certainly to the post-Kuṣāṇa period. The main obstacle however is the apparent incongruity between the text and the Kuṣāṇa images; the former is much more elaborate than the latter. Therefore it is difficult to apply the evidence from the *Devīmāhātmya* directly to the images. As such, the significance of the early images of the warrior goddess and her multiple arms cannot yet be satisfactorily explained. Currently, it is not possible to go beyond a description of the type, its variations and a possible hypothesis for the advent and meaning of the multiple arms. These are found in the second part (Chapter 20). Perhaps one day there will come to light

³⁴ Franklin C. Southworth, "Lexical Evidence for Early Contacts between Indo-Aryan and Dravidian" *Aryan and Non-Aryan in India*, Michigan Papers on South and Southeast Asia, No. 14; Ann Arbor, 1979, p. 203.

³⁵ Southworth, "Lexical Evidence," see especially pp. 206-207.

³⁶ Southworth lists a few words in Sanskrit and in Tamil that are similar enough to suggest contact between the Indo-Aryans and the Dravidians and exchange of beliefs in the sphere of religion and the supernatural. See Southworth "Lexical Evidence," Appendix C. Also, the *Atharva Veda*'s *Vrātya* hymns are usually interpreted as an example of contact between Vedic Aryans and an Aryan group outside of the *Brāhmaṇic* community.

some external phenomenon which will clarify the religious antecedents of this image.

When faced with such textual deficiencies, not to mention reliance on a textual tradition whose main purpose is far removed from iconographic symbolism, the usefulness of the entire methodology could be raised. The Vedas and the Mahābhārata are patently concerned with the Vedic religion and Brāhmaṇic norms and culture and nowise in helping us decode the multiplicity convention in Indian art. Though philological examination of this literature provides much information on the significance of the convention, there is little merit in using this information unless it can be shown that the place making the art was responsive to the religious and cultural traits that seem to assist the decodification. Can it be shown, for example, that the literature and the norms it portrays played a significant role in Mathurā, where the multiplicity convention flourished first? Can it be shown, in other words, that one or more segments of society in ancient Mathurā knew what we believe we know after painstakingly combing the ancient Hindu literature?

The early history of Mathurā shows that it was a stronghold of Brāhmaṇic culture and its norms (Chapter 21). Mathurā's society was rooted in the Brāhmaṇical *varṇa*-system; the Sanskrit cultural milieu was promoted there; Brahmans were esteemed in Mathurā; Vedic mores, including the ritual were in evidence, and, the little that can be gleaned about daily-life seems to indicate that the ideal four aims of man sanctioned by Brāhmaṇic custom were followed.³⁷ This high respect continues in post-Vedic times. Patañjali (c. 150 B.C.) who probably lived in Mathurā cites specific texts of the Yajurveda school that were recited in every village.³⁸ A few examples of Brāhmaṇism in Mathurā will suffice, as the full extent of the evidence can be found elsewhere.³⁹ Two Vedic sacrificial posts, *yūpas*, were found in Mathurā. One dating to the time of Vāsiṣka, commemorates the performance of the Vedic Dvādaśarattrā, a *śrauta* sacrifice.⁴⁰ The Mahābhārata (in 8.30.73), also indicates that the Mathurā region was known for celebrating the Vedic sacrifices (*yajñas*). Brahmans were honored and patronized in Mathurā according to information from inscriptional evidence. A Mathurā inscription of the year 28 of the time of Huviṣka, records that at the *punyaśāla* (an alms-house) one hundred Brahmans were to be fed on the fourteenth day of the bright half of the month.⁴¹ The Huviṣka pedestal inscription states that something was done for Brahmans who were regular guests at the site.⁴² The high status of Brāhmaṇic society in Mathurā can be gauged by the accommodating

³⁷ For details, see my Introduction to *Mathurā: The Cultural Heritage*, pp. xi–xv.

³⁸ See M. Witzel, "Localisation of Vedic Texts," *India and The Ancient World. History, Trade and Culture before A.D. 650*, ed. Gilbert Pollet, Leuven 1987, p. 145 and fn. 30.

³⁹ See *Mathurā: The Cultural Heritage*.

⁴⁰ See H. Lüders, *Mathurā Inscriptions*, ed. by K.L. Janert, Göttingen, 1961, pp. 125–126. M.C. Joshi reports that his Mathurā excavation yielded a terracotta seal with the legend *yūpalathikasa* on a side; see M.C. Joshi, "Mathurā as an Ancient Settlement," in *Mathurā: The Cultural Heritage*, p. 168. The excavator states, in a personal communication, that "the term *yūpalathikasa* (*yūpa-yaṣṭhikasya*) can be interpreted several ways: carrier or maker of *yūpa*-posts or borne by the grace of any specific sacrifice (*yajña*) represented by the sacrificial post."

⁴¹ Sten Konow, "Mathura Brahmi Inscription of the Year 28," *Epigraphia Indica*, Vol. 21, 1931–32, pp. 55–61, Lüders, *Mathurā Inscriptions*, p. 145.

⁴² Lüders, *Mathurā Inscriptions*, pp. 138–140. Lüders infers that the place was a *sabhā*, or assembly hall, used for feeding Brahmans.

gestures made in its direction by the non-Brāhmaṇical rulers of the town. Both the foreign Kṣatrapa court and the Kuṣāṇas made overtures to accommodate the Brahmans of Mathurā.⁴³

Tantamount to the support and dissemination of Brāhmaṇic culture is the vitality of the Sanskrit language. Sanskrit is, of course, the language of the Vedas and the epic. Sanskrit enjoyed considerable prestige in ancient Mathurā. Perhaps the best proof comes from adoption of a hybrid Sanskrit on Mathurā's Buddhist, Hindu and Jain inscriptions made during the Kṣatrapa period, that is, during a period of foreign rule that precedes the Kuṣāṇa period.⁴⁴ Recent scholarship has thus concluded that Mathurā was a bastion of Brahmanism in war, in ritual and social practices during the ages emphasized in the present study.⁴⁵ We may say that scholarship has finally caught up with the reputation of Mathurā perpetuated within the Hindu tradition itself.

"The prominence of the region of Mathurā in the propagation of brahmanical life is seen most clearly in the second chapter of the Mānavadharmasāstra, verses 17–23.⁴⁶ There the Indian moral world is conceived as a concentrum in which impurity recedes as one moves from the borderlands towards the heart of the country. The broadest territory in which any degree of decorum can be expected is Āryavarta, which extends from Himalaya to Vindhya and from sea to sea. The extremes of the Aryan country are inhabited, however, by people of corrupted life. More select, morally, is that portion of Āryavarta that is called Madhyadeśa, the Middle Country . . . The behavior of the people of that Middle Country is middling and not blameworthy. But for the true models of purity one must turn still further inward to two areas that are truly exemplary. The first is Brahmāvarta (just west of modern Delhi), whose inhabitants are the supreme model of virtuous conduct. The second land is Brahmārṣideśa, whose brahmans are the final resort for all who seek authoritative moral instruction. This Land of the Vedic Sages consists of the country of the Matsyas, the Pañcālas and the Śūrasenas.⁴⁷ "From a Brāhmaṇa born in that country let all men on earth learn their several usages", says Manu 2:20.⁴⁸ It is not a sectarian work, but the first of the dharmaśāstras, that accords this position of unrivaled leadership in the proclamation of the brahmanical life to the country extending today from Delhi to Mathurā."⁴⁹

Mathurā held on to this position beyond the time of Manu. The Varāha Purāṇa advises a pilgrim in Mathurā to prefer honoring a brahman born and bred from that locale rather than a brahman who studies the four (that is, all) Vedas but who does not stem

⁴³ Th. Damsteegt, "The pre-Kuṣāṇa Inscriptions and the Supersession of Prakrit by Sanskrit in North India in General and at Mathurā in Particular," *Mathurā: The Cultural Heritage*, pp. 298ff. B.N. Mukherjee, "Growth of Mathurā and Its Society (Up to the End of the Kuṣāṇa Age)," *Mathurā: The Cultural Heritage*, pp. 64, 66.

⁴⁴ Damsteegt, "Pre-Kuṣāṇa and Kuṣāṇa Inscriptions," esp. p. 302.

⁴⁵ See Norvin Hein, "Kālayavana, A Key to Mathurā's Cultural Self-Perception" *Mathurā: The Cultural Heritage*, pp. 223–235; cf. Alf Hiltebeitel, "Kṛṣṇa at Mathurā," *Mathurā: The Cultural Heritage*, pp. 93ff. esp. pp. 97–98.

⁴⁶ The work dates somewhere between the second century B.C. and the second century A.D.

⁴⁷ The Śūrasenas ruled Śūrasena, one of the sixteen *mahājanapadas*, and had their capital at Mathurā.

⁴⁸ *The Laws of Manu*, transl. by G. Bühler, *SBE* Vol. 35, 1886, p. 33.

⁴⁹ Hein, "Kālayavana," p. 232.

from Mathurā.⁵⁰ There can be no doubt but that the environment of Mathurā should have provided excellent opportunities for the religious ideas and ideals of the Vedas and the epic (i.e. Brāhmaṇic ideas and ideals) to be heard, disseminated, and put into practice. The mechanisms by which this was done and by which the milieu effected the art are discussed in Chapter 21.

It remains to demonstrate how this book works with respect to individual images. The demonstration which follows focuses on a popular *vaiṣṇava* image with multiple arms. The aim is to illustrate, by way of the image of four-armed Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa, the technique devised for determining the meaning of a particular image having the multiplicity convention.

There is a small Kuṣāṇa relief from Mathurā which has been called a veritable Brahmanic "iconographic document" (Pl. 1.3).⁵¹ It shows four figures, one of whom is Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa. All the figures are of the same height; all stand frontally, all raise their right hands in the same gesture (*vyāvṛtta-*, where the hand is turned slightly to the right). The divinity on the extreme left might be Kuvera, the godling representing the mineral wealth in the earth. Two-armed, he holds what looks like a purse in his left hand and a long staff under his left arm. Since the usual corpulency of Kuvera is absent, the identity of this figure is uncertain, and it is distinctly possible that Skanda/Kārttikeya is represented. Next to him is the goddess Gajalakṣmī; her realm is beauty and prosperity. She is being anointed by water in flasks held in the trunks of raised elephants. Two-armed, the goddess holds a lotus in her left hand. To the extreme right is two-armed Śiva in his androgynous form. As such, he represents the cosmic creator as a self-seminating power, the One who can create the many. The many include all phenomenal dualities. The fact that Śiva has the capacity to create all dualities is symbolized by their prototype, the male and the female. Śiva's right side is male and it shows the erect phallus. The left side has the feminine features, namely the breast, the extended hip, the long dhoti and a bracelet around the foot. Next to Śiva is Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa. He is four-armed. He holds a heavy mace and discus in the two extra hands. The natural left holds a flask. God wears a dhoti, a scarf, ear pendants and a crown. Stylistically, all the deities are represented in a similar fashion, indicating that they may be of equal importance in this relief. However, something is being said of Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa that does not apply to the others as he alone has multiple arms. We can discount a narrative, or a *līlā* context. Each deity confronts the worshipper individually as a deity with special powers in particular domains.

What theological notions are being attributed to Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa? What is the significance of his four-arms? How does their significance contribute or modify what is being said about Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa? This is the sort of problem which this book attempts to solve.

⁵⁰ Varāha Purāṇa 165.57-58. See P.V. Kane, *History of Dharmaśāstra* IV, Poona, p. 579.

⁵¹ It is No. 25 20 in the Mathura Museum. V.S. Agrawala (*A Catalogue of the Brahmanical Images in Mathura Art*, Lucknow 1951, p. 41) rightfully considers this relief "An Eclectic Iconographic Document."

It is useful to isolate the various components of the problem for which answers are being sought. The components divide themselves into six questions:

1. Is there a general denotation for multiple bodily parts and forms which includes the subset, multiple arms?
2. If there is, does the textual tradition associate a *vaiṣṇava* god with this general denotation?
3. Does the textual tradition make specific reference to a four-armed Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa which can clarify later iconography?
4. Does the textual tradition ascribe certain symbolic values to “four”?
5. Does the textual tradition ascribe certain symbolic values to multiplicity of arms?
6. Can the symbolism of the attributes, the *mūdras* and the *āsana* be assessed?

N.B. The book is not a catalogue illustrating all early icons with the multiplicity convention and annotating the illustrations with answers to these questions. As the ensuing demonstration shows, the answers are pieced together from information throughout Parts I and II. The extended analyses of paradigmatic models in this book are meant to generate the means by which comparable pieces can be interpreted.

It has been proposed above that a “biological world view” as Betty Heiman so aptly phrased it,⁵² conditions the conceptualization and the general denotation of the multiplicity convention. Multiple bodily parts and forms are associated with creator gods because of an underlying biological metaphor that persists in ancient Hinduism: cosmic creation – actively or passively undertaken – is the result of forms emitted by the creator into externality (Chapter 2 etc.). The view that creation is cosmic parturition accounts for the *viśvarūpa* concept and imagery. When a text attempts to convey the *idea* of *viśvarūpa*, the usual recourse is to enumerate the image of Rig Vedic Puruṣa who is “thousand-headed, thousand-eyed, thousand-footed.” The image of Puruṣa echoes still in the “many arms, eyes, bellies and mouths” ascribed to *viśvarūpa* Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa in the Bhagavad-Gītā. Multiple arms are conceptually part of the *viśvarūpa* image and partake therefore of the basic multiplicity denotation.

Viṣṇu and Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa (to become an *avatāra* of Viṣṇu in *bhakti* literature), are both associated with the *viśvarūpa* concept in the early texts. The occurrence of *viśvarūpa* Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa in the Gītā has just been mentioned. Viṣṇu is likely to be a creator god conceived as the axis mundi or world pillar in the Rig Veda (Chapter 2). The axis mundi is a creative force in the Atharva Veda, where it is called Skambha (“pillar”) and considered to be *viśvarūpa* (Chapter 3). In the Brāhmaṇas, the connection between Viṣṇu and the pillar reasserts itself. This time it is the sacrificial pillar (*yūpa*) which is associated with Viṣṇu (cf. ŚB 3.7.1.17), and the multiform nature of the pillar continues to be recognized (Chapter 7; Śaḍ. Brāh. 4.4.10). Viṣṇu also has affinities with the major cosmic creator of the Brāhmaṇas, namely *viśvarūpa* Puruṣa-Prajāpati (Chapter 7). The outcome of this gradual

⁵² Betty Heimann, *Facets of Indian Thought*, New York, 1964, pp. 37ff.

rapprochement between the *viśvarūpa* concept and the future great god of Vaiṣṇavism can be espied in the Mahānārāyaṇa Upaniṣad, a theistic Upaniṣad glorifying *viśvarūpa* Nārāyaṇa, destined to become subsumed into Viṣṇu, in many Vaiṣṇava sects.

Scanning the religious literature for answers to the first two questions it may be concluded that Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa and Viṣṇu (plus various other incipient *vaiṣṇava* powers) are associated with the general denotation of the multiplicity convention. Both deities are associated with the *viśvarūpa*-concept which defines a deity's internal and external structure with a numerical totality of bodily parts and forms. Multiple arms are included among the external parts multiplied to their ultimate numerical limit in a *viśvarūpa* image. Being in a state of *viśvarūpa* is paradigmatic for being capable of activity that mimics human parturition on a grand scale. Perhaps it should be reiterated that the underlying link between inner multiple forms and outer bodily parts rests on the analogy established in the Upaniṣadic simile mentioned above (and see Chapter 11.A). In short, Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa and Viṣṇu are conceived as being cosmic creator gods who emit forms and that is why the notion of *viśvarūpa*, or any other notion involving the multiplicity convention may be applied to them.

As may be expected, there are clear distinctions between a *viśvarūpa* form of god and a four-armed form of god. Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa himself explains these distinctions with considerable clarity in the Bhagavad Gītā (Chapter 11.B). The *viśvarūpa* form is his higher form. This form however overwhelms the devotee to whom Kṛṣṇa has granted a view. The devotee, Arjuna, pleads with god to show him once more the peaceful, humane form he is accustomed to seeing (Chapter 11.B). Awed and frightened, he asks the Lord to show himself instead with "crown and mace, discus in hand . . . take up again your four-armed form . . ." [Bhagavad Gītā 11.46]. The aspect of god which the devotee asks to see coincides precisely with the mūrti of Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa seen on the small Mathurā relief (Pl. 1.3). As a matter of fact, this is the form of Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa most frequently represented in *vaiṣṇava* art of Mathurā during the Kuṣāṇa period (Chapter 18). From what the Gītā says about the four-armed form of god, we may interpret that it is the humane aspect of a triadic divinity. God's threefold essential nature includes the higher transcendental (*viśvarūpa*) and imminent (eightfold) forms (Chapter 11.B), and lastly the apprehensible form on earth. This is the four-armed form of god which ought to be a source of comfort to Arjuna, otherwise he would not ask to see it in his frightened state. It is also, according to Arjuna, a peaceful form; on that account and because it comforts, the aspect may well be a protective aspect of god. But why does this aspect have four-arms, not some other number, or some other multiplied limb or organ? Are there specific symbolic values associated with "four" and multiple "arms" that are particularly suitable for the humane, protective, peaceful aspect of the cosmic creator on earth?

Yes, there are. We are not without resources in attempting to understand the significance of both the number "four" and "arms."⁵³ The Brāhmaṇas contain much information

⁵³ An important procedural point may already be introduced here. It will be seen that numerical symbolism and the symbolism of bodily parts and forms are derived from textual evidence which is not influenced by its connection with any one deity. Therefore it is a major theoretical proposition in this work, that

on the symbolism the ancients associated with certain numbers (Chapter 6). The Kauṣītaki Brāhmaṇa states in concluding a mythic account, "Up to four there are pairings, union." The number "four" thus symbolizes "union" and "propagation," "pairing" and "production." In addition, "four" conveys "completeness" of the world on a horizontal plane. This symbolic meaning is derived from the notion that the four directions of the world, as a unit, represent "total space on earth." Already in the Rig Veda the four quarters are synonymous with the whole world, and the earth is described as being "four pointed" (Chapter 2). Besides representing the quadrants, "four" is seen as a number which completes a triad. In this context "four" applies to vertical space. The notion that vertical space is tripartite is axiomatic from the earliest Vedic hymns onward. The three regions are earth, the atmosphere and the heavens. The idea that the tertiary division could be completed by a tetrad had also been recognized from the time of the Rig Veda. In the Rig Veda, the heavenly regions consist of the visible sky in the phenomenal world and a "highest sky" imperceivable to the world below. "Four" in sum relates mainly to visible, phenomenal space, although invisible space may also be included in its symbolism. In particular "four" connotes that which is visible on the horizontal plane, apprehensible matter, and that which promotes human life and well-being, such as propagation etc. The symbolic language of "four" further symbolizes "that which is real," "that which is grasped or verified by the senses," in addition to the notion of divine majesty and actions undertaken for the benefit of mankind (Chapter 12).

"Arms" are closely connected with notions of "lordship," "sovereignty," and "physical action." In the Puruṣasūkta, for example, the ruling class is fashioned from the arms of Puruṣa (RV 10.90.12). Perhaps multiplicity of arms intensifies the concept of "earthly rulership" into the concept of "universal rulership." It may also be noted that the attributes held by Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa bespeak of sovereignty. The discus is a weapon in battle; the conch is used in signaling in battle, and the mace is emblematic of rulership. The Mahābhārata provides additional insight into the symbolism of "arms" that stems from proto-Sāṃkhya ideologies. The Śānti Parvan (12.298.10ff.) lists the eight productive material principles and the sixteen modifications, which according to proto-Sāṃkhya thought ultimately account for the arising of all existence. In this passage, two hands (*hastau*) are listed among the sixteen modifications and as one of the five organs of action. "Two hands" is likely to be a synecdoche for "two arms." As such, if two arms are the conventional [that is, normal] organs of action, perhaps more than two signifies supra-normal limbs performing supra-normal action. Here are throughout, decodification rests upon the dynamics of the biological world view which intensifies notions attributed to human biology in order to explain divine structure and/or actions.⁵⁴

By now it will be recognized that the mūrti of Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa (Pl. 1.3) is composed of mutually supportive ideographs: "four" and "arms" and "conch," "mace," "discus,"

numerical symbols and the symbols of bodily parts and forms can be applied, like figures of speech, wherever the symbolic concepts are needed. E.g. Chapter XI.A, p. 130; XI.B, p. 147.

⁵⁴ Cf. Diana Eck, "The Dynamics of Indian Symbolism" in *The Other Side of God*, ed. by P.L. Berger, Garden City 1981, pp. 157-181.

“crown” all declare god’s sovereignty over the whole world on the horizontal and vertical planes. They remind that god is sovereign over all life which he has created. They announce that god does not abandon his creation, but enters into the world to comfort the living. Assuming a visible manifestation, god shows himself alone or in conjunction with other divinities. His form is straight as a pillar pervading space, crowned, four-armed and gesturing to greet his devotee. It is a form that blends god’s awesome majesty with his humaneness and renders him as the approachable savior.

Many a time in the course of writing this book I have questioned whether the threads need to stretch so long in order to establish the significance of the multiplicity convention in early Hindu art. The answer, like so many other things concerning the theme, was already present and waiting to be found:

... many threads connect the iconography of Hinduism with the oldest monument of Indian literature. To treat them adequately in detail would require a volume of considerable size.⁵⁵

⁵⁵ Macdonell, “Development of early Hindu Iconography,” p. 169.

CHAPTER TWO

THE RIG VEDA DEFINES THE MULTIPLICITY CONVENTION

“It has been suggested that Indian religious iconography was inspired by that of Ancient Greece; but the material for an iconography is already to be found in the Veda, even to the description of many-armed divinities.”

Louis Renou, *Religions of Ancient India*

Right from the beginning, the Veda knows and defines the multiplicity convention. The Rig Veda, the most ancient and sacred text in the Vedic tradition contains approximately seventy verses which associate multiple bodily parts and forms with the divine.¹ The multiplicity convention is used in a fundamentally consistent manner throughout the text; it begins in the oldest stratum and continues to have currency in the younger portions. Due to the consistency of application, a set of definitions is discernible. The definitions are detailed, discreet and unexpectedly stable. The religious symbolism of the convention does not alter significantly in subsequent Vedas and ancient Hindu literature.

In the Rig Veda, a deity associated with the act of creation, on a cosmic scale, is denoted with multiple bodily parts and forms. The type of deity so denoted may change within the text, but not the basic symbolism. Throughout, multiplicity describes the structure of a deity who creates, fashions, or projects forms.² Three discreet definitions result from this general definition:

Definition 1 – Multiple bodily parts and forms are associated with a deity who creates the phenomenal world.

Tvaṣṭṛ exemplifies Definition 1. One of the older creator gods in the Rig Veda, Tvaṣṭṛ is a vivifier, a fashioner, one who gives life.³ In a dialogue between the primeval twins Yama and Yamī (RV 10.10), Yamī states in verse 5: “Already in the womb (*garbha*), the creator made us husband and wife, god Tvaṣṭṛ, the vivifier, the omniform”. The womb which contains the twins belongs to Tvaṣṭṛ, whose capacity to generate life-forms is

¹ For a list of the verses and deities, see D.M. Srinivasan, “The Religious Significance of Multiple Bodily Parts to Denote the Divine: Findings from the Rig Veda”, *Asiatische Studien* XXIX.2, 1975, Table 1, p. 179.

² An exception is the use of multiple bodily parts to describe Rig Veda demons. Of these, Viśvarūpa is the most often mentioned; for passages pertaining to Viśvarūpa, from the Vedic through Purāṇic literature, see W. Kirfel, *Die dreiköpfige Gottheit*, Bonn 1948, pp. 30–37. Viśvarūpa possesses three heads (*triśīṣan-* 10.8.8; 10.99.6; see also 10.8.9), six eyes (*ṣadakṣa-* 10.99.6) and seven rays (*saptaraśmi-* 10.8.8). Viśvarūpa’s demonic nature is related to his confining cows (10.8.8), not to his having this unusual number of multiple bodily parts. The Avesta also knows of the demonic serpent, Azi Dahāka, who has three mouths, three heads and six eyes.

³ Srinivasan “Findings from the Rig Veda”, 143–147.

reiterated in AV 6.78.3: “Tvaṣṭṛ generated the wife, Tvaṣṭṛ [generated] thee as husband for her; let Tvaṣṭṛ make for you two a thousand life-times (*āyus*), a long life-time”.⁴ These two verses give strong indication that Tvaṣṭṛ generates the life-forms that are in his womb-belly, as it were. Because he contains such forms within himself, Tvaṣṭṛ is called “Omni-form”, that is, “a deity who creates all the possible number of forms” (*viśvarūpa*) in RV 3.55.19, as well as in RV 10.10.5 (*supra*).⁵

A younger deity exemplifying Definition 1 is Viśvakarman, the All-Maker. As his name indicates, Viśvakarman represents creative energy thinly disguised as a personal god. Viśvakarman also has a fruitful womb, as it were. Viśvakarman has within himself the womb containing all creatures as well as all other phenomenal forms awaiting creation. It is the god’s womb which in RV 10.82.5 is beyond all creation, being prior to everything. Because his womb contains all creations, he knows all creations (RV 10.82.3). Being filled with the raw material of creation, he is described in 10.81.3, as having eyes, mouths, arms, feet on all sides. In the context of the Vedic sacrifice, Viśvakarman brings forth the contents of his belly; he offers himself, his body, as the first sacrificial offering.

Both Tvaṣṭṛ and Viśvakarman are male cosmic creators attributed a womb chamber (*garbha*) which contains the forms they will emit. Embedded in Definition 1 is the belief that cosmic creation is an intensification of human parturition: from the beginning, the male god generates the form or forms that are inside of his womb-chamber.

Definition 2 – Multiple bodily parts and forms are associated with a deity who represents the raw material out of which the phenomenal world is created.

An androgynous⁶ Asura Bull expresses Definition 2 in the older sections of the Rig Veda. RV 3.38.4 postulates a primordial Asura Bull, by the name of Viśvarūpa (“Omni-form”). His name indicates that he is capable of creating all forms. But in the actual process of creation, which is a process of emission, others bring forth his forms. The Asura Bull is passive. Other gods possessing *māyā*⁷ (the *māyin*-) acting as if they were constructing, bring out, or as verse 7 says “measure out”, each form located in the Asura Bull. The Asura Bull, Viśvarūpa, is a self-seminating first principle filled with the total number of life-forms; however others need to bring them out.

Puruṣa, the Cosmic Male, represents the raw material out of which the universe is shaped in the Puruṣasūkta, RV 10.90, a late hymn. Thus Puruṣa expresses Definition 2

⁴ W.D. Whitney, *Atharva-veda Samhitā* in *HOS VII*, Cambridge, 1905 p. 340, *tvastā jāyam ajanayat tvastāsyai tvam patim/tvastā sahasram ayūṁṣi dīrgham āyuh kṛnotu vām*. In this hymn for matrimonial happiness, v. 3 seems to say that the couple “was made for each other”.

⁵ RV 3.55.19 ab: God Tvaṣṭṛ, the vivifier (being) omniform, has fostered creatures and has abundantly created (them), *devas tvastā savitā viśvarūpaḥ puṣoṣa prajāḥ purudhā jajāna*. RV 10.10.5 ab: *garbhe nu nau janitā dāmpatī kar devas tvastā savitā viśvarūpaḥ*.

⁶ Verses giving details are in Srinivasan, “Finding from the Rig Veda”, 148.

⁷ In the Rig Veda, *māyā* signifies a cosmic power enabling those deities having special insights and knowledge to create the truly wondrous. The connotations expressed by *māyā* in the Veda are “power, wisdom, subtle device” and the term *māyā*- has been roughly defined as follows by Gonda: “incomprehensible insight, wisdom, judgement and power enabling its possessor to create something or to do something, ascribed to mighty beings”; see J. Gonda, *Four Studies in the Language of the Veda*, The Hague, 1959, p. 126.

in a younger section of the Rig Veda. The opening verse of the hymn which describes Puruṣa with all possible bodily parts is, in effect, describing the structure of the Cosmic Male from whom the whole universe, category by category, is generated, 10.90.1 states that Puruṣa has a thousand⁸ heads, a thousand eyes, a thousand feet. The meaning is that Puruṣa is omniform. Like the ancient Asura Bull Viśvarūpa, Puruṣa's omniform nature is also understood to be androgynous (cf. 10.90.5 ab). The idea is that an omniform, androgynous Male represents the raw material of the universe: "Puruṣa alone is all this universe, what has been and what is to become" (10.90.2). Puruṣa too is the passive substance from which others generate forms. Again, owing to the late character of the hymn, the creation of forms is the product of the ritual. Puruṣa is the sacrificial victim (vss. 7, 11), whom the gods use as the oblation (see 10.90.6) when they perform the sacrifice. The process by which the forms come out of Puruṣa continues to be the emission process; the emitted forms are declined in the ablative (e.g. see vss. 5:12–14), indicative that they originate from Puruṣa.

Definition 3 – Multiple bodily parts and forms are associated with a deity who creates, projects, emanates forms from its numen into the phenomenal world. It is by these forms that the deity is apprehended in externality.

Definition 3 concerns the ability of the invisible god to cause the appearance of his own visible form(s) on earth. Indra, in RV 3.53.8, has this ability; he is in the habit of becoming every *rūpa*, in effecting *māyās* around his own body.⁹ *Māyā* here seems to apply to Indra's special ability to create *rūpa*-s. A *rūpa* is "a concrete, outer form" and may be used to mean "manifestation". Verse 6.47.18c again refers to this special ability of Indra, stating that the characteristic of Indra – to be *pururūpa*, or multiform – is due to his *māyās*.¹⁰ From these two verses it may be inferred that *māyā* (the incomprehensible power of Indra), enables the god to assume forms in the phenomenal world.

Wherefrom do divine manifestations originate and how do they arrive on earth? Verses to Soma provide some answers. The god Soma is located above the vault of heaven (*nāka*), in a region apart from the visible world. We may say that the god resides in a transcendental sphere.¹¹ From this sphere and again by means of *māyā*, Soma projects

⁸ "A thousand" (*sahasra*-), followed by a term for some bodily part or form constructs an expression which may define the structure of a creator god or an all-inclusive divine power of the numinous. *Sahasra* in these expressions is not to be taken as the actual number but as expressing the idea "total number", "all number" of the bodily parts or forms. See Srinivasan, "Findings from the Rig Veda", 152 and fn. 51. But note that I no longer associate the idea of "limitless" with *sahasra*, believing now that a limitation is set by the ultimate number. For example, Agni is "thousand-eyed (RV 1.79.12 *sahasrākṣa*), meaning that he has total vision. Since all-seeing is equated with all-knowing, *sahasrākṣa*, in effect ascribes omniscience to Agni. Agni's thousand horns (RV 5.1.8) may be a metaphorical reference to his being composed of all the possible number of flames.

⁹ 8 ab: *rūpam-rūpam maghavā bobhavīti māyāḥ kṛtvānas tanvām pari svām*. Renou's definition of *māyā* ("la faculté de construire des formes", L. Renou et J. Filliozat, *L'Inde Classique* [Paris] 1947, p. 317) is very suitable here.

¹⁰ 6.47.18: *rūpam-rūpam pratirūpo babhūva tad asya rūpam praticakṣaṇāya/indro māyābhiḥ pururūpa iyate yuktā hy āsya harayaḥ śatā daśa*.

¹¹ For details on this sphere and Soma's transposition from one sphere to another, see Srinivasan, "Finding from the Rig Veda", 154, 176–177.

forms (*rūpa*-s) of himself into the phenomenal world. That is, he projects forms below the *nāka*. The *rūpas* of Soma are the soma juices. So, the soma juices used in the Vedic soma rituals are, in fact, manifestations of the god on high. Each *rūpa* (? droplet) is believed to be the location of the god's divine power (*dhāman*).¹² God Soma is *viśvarūpa* (cf. RV 6.41.3) and has *viśva rūpa* (RV 9.85.12), which he can project into externality. Definition 3, the example of Soma shows, describes a deity in an invisible region who is able to emit forms from its essence into the visible world. On that account, the transcendental deity is associated with multiple bodily parts and forms.

These definitions share a common outlook on the nature of the creative process. Creation of forms results from pushing out already existant forms that are within the creator. The forms that fill the phenomenal world are not, in this view, created from scratch. They are forms that have already assumed shape in a pre-existent stage. In that stage, they but await expulsion. Birth of phenomenal forms is here analogous to birth through labour, and this image of creation closely relates to the use of divine multiplicity of bodily parts and forms in the Rig Veda.

This outlook maintains that the creator creates the universe by emitting all forms which lie dormant in his belly. The manifold forms comprise all dichotomies experienced in human existence. Infinitely various, these forms come into being at the time the fullness of the creator begins to unfold. Being thus filled with the forms of the phenomenal world until parturition, the creator god is with multiple bodily parts and forms much the same way as a mother is with child. The creator god may be active or passive in the process of emission. In the latter case, the creator equates with the manifold raw material requiring the exertion of others to bring it out. Whether active or passive, multiple bodily parts and forms describe the structure of the god involved in the process of creation by emission. Divine parturition lies at the heart of Definitions 1 and 2. Definitions 1 and 2 provide an answer to "how visible, mortal forms were created in the world". Definition 3 answers "how visible, immortal forms were created in the world". Here the subject of creation is the forms which divinity projects to make itself known in the phenomenal world. The belief should have been that divinity can show itself by its own will in the physical world. Again by the process of emission, the numinous projects from itself forms that are the visible locations of its particular divine powers.

The three definitions can explain the significance of the multiplicity convention associated with all the Rig Vedic divinities. Of these, I shall discuss four in detail. It is important to understand references to the multiform structure of Rudra, the Vedic forerunner of the god Śiva, since the latter's icons are associated with the multiplicity convention from the start. For the same reason, conceptualizations pertaining to Viṣṇu's ability to project forms are examined next. Descriptions of the multiple bodily parts and forms of Agni and Brhaspati reveal useful information on numbers relating to multiple bodily parts that reoccur in the later iconography. Verses to Agni give insight into the

¹² See J. Gonda, *The Meaning of the Sanskrit term Dhāman-* in *Verhandelingen der Koninklijke Nederlandse Akademie van Wetenschappen, afd. Letterkunde*, n.s. Vol. 73.2, 1967, pp. 20-21.

symbolism of “three” and “four”, and those to Bṛhaspati comment decisively on the number “seven”. References to the multiple bodily parts and forms of Rudra, Viṣṇu and Agni illustrate Definition 3; possibly this is also true of Bṛhaspati, but the case is less clear.

From a passage in the Family Books (RV 2.33.9), the oldest section of the Rig Veda, it is learned that Rudra has multiple outer forms (*pururūpa*): “With steadfast limbs, multiformed (*pururūpa*), possessed of marvellous and impressive power (*ugra*), the tawny (god) adorned himself with brilliant gold.¹³ From the master (*īśāna*) of this world of many (forms),¹⁴ from Rudra, the *asura*- power never leaves.” The significance of *pururūpa* in this verse is based on the occurrence of the same term in the verse to Indra, cited above as an illustration of Definition 3. The verse to Indra, RV 6.47.18, is also from the Family Books, so we may be quite sure that the basis for the comparison is valid. Here, Rudra’s epithet *pururūpa* indicates that the god has multiple outer forms which may be considered the god’s manifestations. *Ugra* refers to Rudra’s creative energy needed to create *rūpa*-s, including his own. In other words, Rudra’s multiformed nature is another illustration of Definition 3. *Ugra* is etymologically related to the neuter noun *ojas*, defined as “vital energy; special vital power and creative energy . . .”; *ugra* is charged with similar meanings.¹⁵ Indeed the words *ugra/ojas* and *māyā* (already noted in contexts where it means “creative cosmic power”), seem to overlap in areas of meaning. All convey the idea of a formidable creative energy.¹⁶

It is very significant that Rudra is called *īśāna* in a verse proclaiming the god’s ability to create manifestations of himself. *Īśāna* designates one who has power and might. Used here with the genitive, it means that Rudra stands in relation to the world as “one who has power over it, one who is in possession of it”.¹⁷ Rudra, as *īśāna* of this world, has dominion over the world. That is why he is called “Father of the World” in RV 6.49.10. The designation *īśāna*- follows Rudra throughout Vedic literature and ultimately designates the fifth and most important head of the *śaiva* Pañcamukha Liṅga. In the Brāhmaṇa accounts of the eight different forms of Rudra, designated by eight different names (see ŚB 6.1.3.17 and Kauṣītaki Brāhmaṇa 6.1–9), *Īśāna* already occurs as one of his names.¹⁸ When the Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad characterizes Rudra-Śiva as the lord who is the sovereign and ruler of immortality, the name used in this context is *Īśāna* (see 3.12; 3.15); the same name appears in the Mahānārāyaṇa Upaniṣad as the fifth and last name in a series of “mukha” names.¹⁹ *Īśāna* continues to designate the fifth and central mukha of a

¹³ For “gold” meaning “immortality” note ŚB 12.5.2.7; 13.4.1.7 etc.; see J. Eggeling, *The Śatapatha-Brāhmaṇa*, in *SBE* 44, Oxford, 1900, p. 537.

¹⁴ The insertion follows the suggestion of Renou in *EVP* 15, 1966, 159.

¹⁵ On *ugra* see J. Gonda, *Ancient-Indian ojas*, Latin *augos* and the Indo-European nouns in *-es/-os*, Utrecht, 1952, p. 46. See also J. Gonda, *Some Observations on the Relations between “Gods” and “Powers” in the Veda a propos of the phrase sūnuḥ sahasaḥ*, ’s-Gravenhage, 1957, p. 19.

¹⁶ Cf. Gonda, *Language*, pp. 126 and 141.

¹⁷ *Īśāna* is a participle from *√īś* (“to possess, to be master of”); it can be used with the genitive in the sense of “being possessed” (cf. 1.73.9).

¹⁸ See Chapter 7, p. 76.

¹⁹ Cf. Chapter 17, p. 234, Chapter 10, p. 119.

Pañcamukha Līṅga in the Purāṇic and Āgamic literature. The theological significance of a Pañcamukha Līṅga, it will be seen, is that it represents the progressive unfolding of the godhead towards full manifestation. Īśāna, by virtue of its fifth, or central, position, symbolizes the superior or highest form of all.²⁰ The appropriateness of the name “Īśāna” for god’s highest manifestation is already forecast in the way it is used in RV 2.33.9.

Though Rudra is a minor god in the Rig Veda, he functions in a special way: he possesses the power to create and project phenomenal forms. This power and his capacity to be multiformed announce the beginning of Rudra’s climb to eminence which will climax with Hinduistic Śiva. The predominantly coherent, internal development from Vedic Rudra to Hindu Śiva can be traced because, in the main, Rudra stems from within the Vedic tradition and not from outside of it. Proof of this proposition is set forth in Chapters 5, 13 and 17. To encapsule what is forthcoming, note that Rudra is invoked to assist in the fight against the *dasyus* in the Rig Veda. *Dasyus* appear to be human beings who are of a different race and a different religion than the Aryans.²¹ It is hard to imagine that Vedic priests would, in such a context, raise invocations to an outsider of their tradition. Arguably, the Rig Veda does not portray the complete spectrum of beliefs associated with Rudra. Yet, a verse as rich linguistically and conceptually in Indo-Aryan features as RV 2.33.9 launches the view that Rudra is less antithetically alien to Vedism than had previously been granted,²² and, his multiformed nature is but one confirmation of this view.

There are no explicit references to Viṣṇu’s multiple bodily parts or forms in the Rig Veda. From the term *dhāman*, applied to Viṣṇu, his ability to project forms into the world may be surmised. In RV 3.55.10 Viṣṇu is honoured thus: “Viṣṇu protects (as) a herdsman the highest sphere, exhibiting the dear immortal locations of his divine power (*dhāman*).²³ Agni knows all these creations. Great is the unique *asura*-nature [lit. *asura*-ship] of the god”. *Dhāman* signifies the manifest locations of the divine power of the numinous. The term presupposes that the numinous transposes its power from some transcendental region to a phenomenal region. It is the forms which the numen wills to create that become its *dhāman*. Thus, when in 3.55.10b Viṣṇu is said to exhibit his divine *dhāman*, it must be concluded that what Viṣṇu is exhibiting are forms which are the external locations of his divine power. Verses to Soma show that such forms are created by the emission process. Soma uses the power of *māyā* to project forms (*rūpa*) which are the location of his divine power, or *dhāman*.²⁴

²⁰ Consult also the language of “five” in Chapter 12.

²¹ See Wash Edward Hale, *Asura- in Early Vedic Religion*, Delhi, 1986, pp. 150; 153; 154.

²² This verse’s reference to Rudra’s *asura*-power is another important Indo-Aryan attribute of the god. See Srinivasan, “Findings from the Rig Veda”, 164; 145–146.

²³ So also Gonda, *Dhāman*-, p. 43. The term *dhāman*- is of additional interest since its use in the Bhagavad Gītā (± 200 B.C.), indicates that its meaning continues to relate to the “place of the God’s presence” (Bh.G. 8.21; 15.6), see Gonda, *Dhāman*- p. 81.

²⁴ See above and Srinivasan, “Findings from the Rig Veda”, 154. In addition, the term *dhāman*- implies “emission” as the process for manifestation. See Gonda, *Dhāman*- p. 19.

Very little can be said with certainty about the nature of Viṣṇu's projected forms. Recent studies consider the god as representing spacial expansiveness, indicative of the idea of universal penetration and pervasiveness, especially as it relates to a central cosmic axis.²⁵ Such godly power would lead to the conjecture that Viṣṇu's projected forms correlate with an axis mundi penetrating the three regions of the world and sustaining all life therein.

Agni, possessing *māyā* just like Indra, Soma and others, uses his power to emit forms into externality. Agni, a complex god in Vedic mythology, has several distinctly different forms wherein his powers are located. Agni is in both domestic and ritual "fire", in "lightning", and, in "the sun". These forms of Agni make reference to his multiple bodily parts.

Since Agni transposes himself into sun, lightning and fire, and as fire becomes visible in each of the three Vedic sacrificial fires, we may expect three bodily parts to occur in Agni's imagery. Indeed, "three" is associated with Agni's visible manifestations which in themselves may carry broader implications of divine omnipresence.²⁶ The three bodies of light in RV 10.107.6 refer to Agni's three visible forms: fire, lightning, sun.²⁷ RV 3.20.2 also mentions the "three bodies" of Agni in addition to his "three powers", "three abodes", "three tongues". Play on the number "three" symbolic of cosmic totality and completeness,²⁸ predominates in this verse having Agni's pervasiveness as its theme. "Three bodies" should again symbolize Agni's three manifestations, each of which is located in one of the three regions of the visible world. These regions may constitute Agni's "three abodes", or possibly, there is an allusion here to Agni's abodes in the highest heaven, the lower heavens and the earth. Since Agni's "tongue" is a metaphorical equivalent for his "flame" (cf. RV 2.1.13; 3.6.2), "three tongues" should represent the fires in each of the three sacrificial altars²⁹ (in the Brāhmaṇas the altars are symbolic of the three worlds and the fires in the altars come to symbolize cosmic pervasiveness). The "three powers" may refer to Agni's threefold nature (i.e. knowledge, fire, virile strength).

"Four" is a number associated with both ritual and spacial completeness in Indian religious thought.³⁰ The capacity of fire to fill out into all the spacial directions may be symbolized by Agni's four bodily parts. Thus, in RV 5.48.5 where Agni with four faces advances himself with his tongue, "four-faces" (*caturanīka*-) connotes "facing in the four cardinal directions"; the description considers the god as flaming fire extending into all directions on earth (cf. RV 2.3.1). In the same sense, Agni is said to be facing every-

²⁵ J. Gonda, *Viṣṇuism and Śivaism*, London, 1970, p. 10. Cf. F.B.J. Kuiper, "The Three Strides of Viṣṇu", *Indological Studies in honor of W. Norman Brown*, ed. E. Bender, New Haven, 1962, pp. 144-145.

²⁶ An excellent treatment of Agni's triple nature and the resultant multiplicity descriptions is found in A. Bergaigne, *La Religion Védique* I, Paris, 1878, pp. 11ff.

²⁷ So states Sāyana; see Srinivasan, "Findings from the Rīg Veda", 161.

²⁸ For "three" in ancient Indian cosmography, see W. Kirfel, *Die Kosmographie der Inder*, Bonn and Leipzig, 1920, pp. 14, 17, 40-43. On "three", see Chapter 12.

²⁹ Note that in RV 1.146.1, the three ritual fires may be referred to as Agni's "three heads" and the seven reins or rays may be the flames.

³⁰ J. Gonda, *The Savayajñas in Verhandelingen der Koninklijke Nederlandse Akademie van Wetenschappen, afd. Letterkunde* n.s. Vol. 71.2, 1965 pp. 54, 60, 139, 349.

where and to pervade in all directions (*tvam hi viśvatomukha viśvataḥ paribhūr asi* 1.97.6). In RV 10.92.11, the term *caturāṅga*, “four-limbed”, is used as an epithet of Agni Narāśaṃsa, naming him after his capacity to fill out, as fire, into the four directions. Agni, as ritual fire, is called “four-eyed” (*caturākṣa* RV 1.31.13); seeing in the four directions is conceptually allied to the all-seeing/all-knowing flames.

A bodily part of the priestly god Bṛhaspati is associated with “seven”, indicating thereby that from the earliest stratum of the Vedic religion, “seven” is a ritual number.³¹

Bṛhaspati presides over *brahman* an esoteric power activated and made manifest through the sacred word (i.e. the Vedic formula). *Brahman* is set into operation in the ritual, presided over by seven officiating priests.³² These seven praisers recite in unison the sacred word (*vāc*, see RV 10.71.3, where sacred speech is personified); in this way they evoke the *brahman* power. These seven praisers with their seven chanting mouths (cf. RV 9.111.1 *saptāsyebhir ṛkvabhiḥ*) could thus be mystically designated as the loci of Bṛhaspati’s *brahman* power on earth. A correspondence between Bṛhaspati and these priests is illustrated in two passages (RV 4.50.4; 4.51.4) which speak of “seven-mouthed” (*saptāśya-*) Bṛhaspati.³³

The Rig Veda attributes multiple bodily parts and forms to a divinity possessing the supra-normal power to create phenomenal forms. Creation here is the act of bringing forth, particularizing, if you will, substance believed already to “have form”. It is this potentiality to engender forms already contained within the creator that appear to endow him with multiple bodily parts and forms. In other words, the multiplicity convention defines the structure of the cosmic creator.

The origin of divine multiplicity stems from within the Indo-Aryan culture. It does not seem possible that a convention exhibiting enough internal consistency so as to permit three subtle and discreet definitions could come into the Rig Veda from a non-Vedic source. Moreover, from the outset, the multiplicity convention is woven into a series of Rig Vedic beliefs which continue, and, in instances, survive in the art. For example, beliefs that creation is by emission, that a male divinity has a fertile womb-chamber, that an androgynous nature characterizes the creator, that a creator can emanate forms which transpose his powers from one plane to another, these are beliefs present in such artistic expressions as a Mukhalinga (see Chapters 14 and 17), Yakṣas (see Chapter 15), Śiva Ardhanārī (see Chapters 5 and 19) and Viṣṇu Caturvyūha, respectively. Also certain numbers which multiply divine bodily parts and forms in the Rig Veda, numbers like “three”, and “four” are among a select set of numbers used to multiply bodily parts in Hindu icons (see Chapter 12). The fact that the multiplicity convention works well within the Vedic world view must be seen as another indication of its Indo-Aryan origin.

³¹ For other associations with “seven” see Gonda, *The Saṃyajñas*, p. 139.

³² Cf. L. Renou, *Religions of Ancient India*, London, 1953, pp. 32–33.

³³ L. Renou (*EVP* 15, 1966, 64) and A. Hillebrandt (*Lieder des Rgveda*, Leipzig, 1931, p. 60) make the correspondence between the 7 hotṛs and Bṛhaspati. On the number “7” in the Veda, see A. Bergaigne, *Rel. Védique* II, Paris, 1883; pp. 143ff., esp. p. 148.

The ultimate proof however of the Vedic origin of the multiplicity convention lies in its undeniable association with the prime concerns of Vedic man. These are to gain knowledge (*veda*) into the origins of the cosmos, and to establish correspondences between the seen and unseen. For Vedic man, the world he lived in was replete with forms containing the powers of transcendental deities. For him to achieve stability and well-being, these forms had only to be recognized and the powers properly located. Mastery over the unseen was the prize. A search for knowledge into origins and correspondences led Vedic man to inquire into the structure of gods, some of whom had a structure composed of multiple bodily parts and forms.

CHAPTER THREE

THE ATHARVA VEDA SUSTAINS AND EXPANDS THE DEFINITIONS

The three Rig Vedic definitions pertaining to the multiplicity convention are found in the Atharva Veda (AV). It is true that about one seventh of the AV consists of passages that are parallel with the RV. However the AV Saṃhitā often amplifies or expands upon the RV passages.¹ This amplification gains in importance since the AV, though younger in compilation than the RV, contains themes that are older than it.

On the theme of cosmogony so closely intertwined with divine multiplicity, the AV not only expands upon speculative thoughts in the RV, but it invents a variety of creative Powers and details concerning their omnipotent quality, their creative ability, the relationship between the Power and the empirical world and the possibility of gaining knowledge of the Power. These inventions surpass in originality and speculative complexity the Rig Vedic cosmogonic notions.² The degree of complexity approximates the speculations³ of the Yajur Veda Saṃhitās and the main Brāhmaṇas.⁴ Indeed, the level of cosmogonic speculation in the hymns of the AV may best be described as pre-Upaniṣadic, and as such, lead into the ferment of thought represented by the oldest of these philosophic texts. This is because in India, the beginnings of philosophy develop directly out of advances made in cosmogonic speculations.⁵

In all, around fifty-five multiplicity references are noted in the Śaunakīya recension of the Atharva Veda (hereafter AVŚ). About two-thirds of these passages deal with cosmogonic or cosmographic themes; the rest attribute multiplicity to non-anthropomorphic entities.⁶ Due to a high degree of correlation between the significance of the divine multiplicity references in the AV and the RV, and due to the chronological span of the AV, this text places upon the doorstep of the Upaniṣadic period the Rig Vedic definitions together with their amplifications.

¹ Much of this chapter appeared as a paper entitled "The Religious Significance of Divine Multiple Bodily Parts in the Atharva Veda", *Numen*, Vol. XXV, Fasc. 3, 1979, 193-225. I wish to thank the publisher for permission to reprint portions of this paper.

² Cf. L. Renou, "Études Vediques", *Bulletin de la Maison Franco-Japonaise*, N.S. Tome IV, No. 1, 1955, 38-39; Jan Gonda, *Vedic Literature*, Vol. I, fasc. I in *A History of Indian Literature*, Wiesbaden, 1975, p. 295.

³ F. Edgerton, "The Philosophic Materials in the Atharva Veda", in *Studies in Honor of Maurice Bloomfield*, New Haven, 1920, p. 123.

⁴ Gonda, *Vedic Literature*, p. 275. Cf. M. Bloomfield, *The Atharvaveda*, in *Grundriss der Indo-Arischen Philologie und Altertumskunde*, Strassburg, 1899, pp. 1-5.

⁵ F. Edgerton, *The Beginnings of Indian Philosophy*, Cambridge, 1965; see Introduction. W. Norman Brown, *Man in the Universe*, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1966, pp. 16-42.

⁶ As is well known, there are two extant recensions of the Atharva Veda Saṃhitā. There is the AVŚ and the Atharva Veda Paippalāda (hereafter AVP). Regarding the methodology employed to find these references see my "Multiple Bodily Parts in the Atharva Veda", 195 and fn. 13. See Table I, 225, for the List of Passages. In the main, the multiplicity convention attributes to the non-anthropomorphic entity a meaning

Cosmic parturition continues as a creation theory in the AV. The AV demonstrates well the analogy between the human and cosmic process of conception. AVŚ 14.2 is a hymn describing nuptial ceremonies. Verse 32 is used in Kauśika Sūtra 79.6⁷ when a bride enters the nuptial bed; the verse appears to be a blessing upon the bride for abundant offspring. She is described as being “all-formed (*viśvarūpa*) with greatness, rich in future offspring” and instructed to unite with her husband to produce the desired progeny. Evidently the female is *viśvarūpa* because the forms of future offspring are thought to be already within her. An explanation of how the forms get inside the female’s womb is given in verse 5 of AVŚ 5.25, a hymn for successful conception;⁸ herein it is indicated that the great Fashioner or Carpenter, Tvaṣṭṛ, fashions (*√piś*, also “to hew out” or “to carve”) the forms (*rūpa-*) within the womb. Tvaṣṭṛ is suited for this deed since on a cosmic level he engages in a similar activity: he fashions (*√piś* AVŚ 5.12.9) with forms heaven and earth and all beings (*bhuvanāni viśvā*). AVŚ 18.1.5 (= RV 10.10.5), elaborates further saying that Tvaṣṭṛ is himself *viśvarūpa-* and that he, the vivifier, contains in his own womb male and female forms. The implication is that these forms are emitted into externality by the god. AVŚ 6.78 (occurring in AVP 19.16), a hymn employed by Kauś. S. (78.10, 14), in marriage ceremonies also emphasizes Tvaṣṭṛ’s ability to emit forms. Verse 3 says that Tvaṣṭṛ “generated” (*√jan*) the wife as well as the man destined to be her husband. These notions relate closely to those on human conception. On the cosmic plane, Tvaṣṭṛ is *viśvarūpa-* because his womb contains all phenomenal forms; on the human plane, the bride is called *viśvarūpa-* for an analogous reason. Cosmogony continues to be viewed as an intensification of human parturition; the AV inherits this view from the RV, together with the associated usage of *viśvarūpa*.

The AV’s familiarity with the notion that creation can be caused by a passive, omniform deity (Definition 2), is demonstrated by AVŚ 9.4 (AVP 16.24–26). The hymn refers to a Cosmic Bull who is there in the beginning (vs. 2). Then only he and the Waters existed, or as pāda 2a says, in referring to the primeval Bull: “He . . . in the beginning became the counterpart (*pratimā*) of the Waters”. These Waters are the fertilizing Cosmic Waters, and in being their “counterpart”, the Bull is likewise established as a primordial fertilizing force. In this capacity he is *viśvarūpa* (vs. 22). The significance of the epithet is reaffirmed in the first verse of the hymn where the Bull is described as an “impetuous Bull, full of milk and bearing all forms in his bellies” (pl.).⁹ Thus the Cosmic Bull, much like the mythic Asura Bull in the RV, carries all forms of phenomenal reality in his several bellies (*vakṣanā-*) which may be likened to female breasts or wombs. Several seemingly contradictory features are here ascribed to the Cosmic Bull; in being both impetuous and pos-

related to that which this convention has when modifying a deity. Analyses of passages mentioning non-anthropomorphic entities is on 220–223.

⁷ The Kauśika-Sūtra, the most valuable accessory text of the AV, joins the AVŚ recension and deals with material usually considered in the Gṛhya-Sūtras. The Kauś. S. is frequently an excellent indicator of the ritual application of Śaunakīya verses as mantras and rites are closely correlated (Gonda, *Vedic Literature*, p. 278).

⁸ Kauś. S. 35.5 quotes the hymn in a ceremony for conception of a male (*pumsavana*).

⁹ Vs. lab. *sāhasrās tveṣā ṛṣabhāḥ pāyasvān viśvā rūpāṇi vakṣāṇāsu bibhṛat*.

sessed of milk and womb-like bellies, he is associated with both masculine and feminine attributes. Verse 3ab continues the bi-sexual imagery: “a male [yet] pregnant, strong, rich in milk the Bull carries a vessel of wealth”. The Cosmic Bull, again like the Asura Bull, is conceived as an androgynous being, carrying in his wombs all phenomenal forms which the poet calls his “vessel of wealth”. The striking image of a male pregnant with the forms of the world continues.

The Cosmic Bull who is pregnant with phenomenality is offered by the gods in the first sacrifice. At that time, all the gods came together and divided the Bull into portions (see vs. 15). The outcome of the primordial sacrifice is the creation of the world, though this is to be inferred for it is not directly stated. The inference is based on the close similarity between the nature and function of the RV Asura Bull and the AV Cosmic Bull.¹⁰

The AV hymns to Skambha (AV 10.7, 8) illustrate familiarity with the concepts associated with Definition 1. However, these hymns expand the notions in Definition 1 and anticipate Upaniṣadic thought.

Skambha (lit. “prop, support, pillar”) is the fulcrum at the center of the universe. As such, Skambha symbolizes the axis mundi, the pillar which links as well as supports heaven and earth (cf. 10.7.35; 10.8.2).¹¹ Skambha also maintains the atmosphere and the six directions; indeed the pillar has entered the whole of creation (*bhuvana-*). Praised thus in AV 10.7 and 8, Skambha epitomizes new concepts which express more abstractly than do Rig Vedic demiurges the supreme power originating and sustaining the cosmos. AV 10.7.22 summarizes well Skambha’s comprehensive power; the verse implies that the totality of existence (all divinity, all time, all space) is within the cosmic pillar. These mystic beliefs prefigure Upaniṣadic themes, as do Skambha’s identification with *brāhman* (10.7.17; 32–34; 36) and *ātman* (10.8.44). Indeed, the primary intent of these hymns may well have been their speculative thrust; with verses often resembling the *brahmodya* style, hymns 10.7 and 8 scarcely served any ritual use whatsoever.

For all the abstract tendencies, Skambha still retains traces of anthropomorphism. Ascribed two hands, two feet, a voice, ear and eye (10.7.39), a head (10.7.18), mouth (10.7.19, 33), tongue (10.7.19), and veins (10.7.16) etc., Skambha assuredly has the traits of a person viewed as the chief stabilizing force of the cosmos.

Skambha is also a generating force; the hymns make quite clear that all of existence has been emitted from the body of Skambha. AV 10.7 begins with a set of riddles, each one asking *in which* of Skambha’s limbs a particular element of the world resides (e.g. vss. 1, 3, 13), or *from which* limb arose a particular aspect of phenomenality (vss. 2, 20). The

¹⁰ Note also that in the Rig Veda, the Asura Bull represents a more ancient image of primeval matter, while Puruṣa the Cosmic Male of RV 10.90 represents the younger version. The latter retains certain essential features found in the older. It is thus particularly interesting to observe with Renou (*EVP* II, 94) that the AV Cosmic Bull, in being “dismembered” (cf. AVŚ 9.4.12–16) as well as “assembled” (9.4.8) is reminiscent of Puruṣa in the Puruṣasūkta.

¹¹ See Chapter 2, p. 30 on the possible RV correlation between the axis mundi and Viṣṇu.

answers to these questions show that within Skambha's body reside all the elements prior to their creation upon earth. To isolate one such sequence:

vs. 2

From which limb of his does fire blaze?
From which limb does Mātariśvan (wind) blow?
From which limb does the moon measure out?
Measuring out a limb of the great Skambha?

vs. 3

In which limb of his does the earth abide?
In which limb does the atmosphere abide?
In which limb abides the sky, put in place?
In which limb does the higher heaven abide?

vs. 12

In whom the earth, the atmosphere, in whom the sky is set,
Where fire, moon, sun, wind stand fixed
Declare that Skambha: just who indeed is he?

vs. 32

Of whom the earth is the measure, and the atmosphere his belly
Who made the sky from his head – to that best brāhman, adoration!

vs. 33

Whose eye is the sun and the moon, forever new
Who made the fire from his mouth – to that best brāhman, adoration!

vs. 34

Whose breathing in and breathing out is the wind; whose eye became the Aṅgirasas
Who made the cardinal points from his wisdom – to that best brāhman, adoration!

Like ancient Tvaṣṭṛ, Skambha is a cosmic power containing the diversity of phenomenality. AV 10.8.2cd says this well: "In Skambha [dwells] this whole universe, possessed of self (*ātmanvat*) – What breathes and blinks the eye".¹² And like that ancient god, Skambha is also called *viśvarūpa*. Skambha receives the epithet "Omniiform" in 10.7.8; this verse indicates that phenomenality resulted when it was emitted from Viśvarūpa by means of an agent called Prajāpati.

Prajāpati, who is to become the major demiurge of the entire Brāhmaṇa period, appears already in the late Rig Vedic hymns as a protector and creator of living things (e.g. RV 10.121). The AV continues to elaborate on Prajāpati's creative force. AV 7.19.1 says that he generates (*√jan*) creatures, and AV 7.80.3 (= RV 10.121.10 with variants) names the god as the one who gave birth (*√jan*) to all forms (*viśvā rūpāṇi*; RV 10.121.10: *viśvā jātāni*) he enclosed. It is thus entirely in keeping with Prajāpati's function that he is, in the Skambha hymns, the agent who unfolds matter.

Prajāpati however did not create himself. Skambha did. And as AV 10.7.28 intimates, it is erroneous to think otherwise. "Men [think they] know the Golden Germ (*hiranyagarbha*)

¹² R.C. Zaehner, *Hindu Scriptures*, London, New York, 1966, p. 23.

as the unutterable supreme; [But it is] Skambha who in the beginning emitted it, the gold within the world". That is, Skambha emitted Prajāpati, who until the time of "birth" was nurtured in his womb (cf. AV 10.8.13a). Clearly the imagery of cosmic parturition continues to be closely adhered to. It is equally clear that this symbolism conveys a new speculative position. The position understands that the personal creator is not the supreme creative force. This role is reserved for the primordial creator, who is *viśvarūpa*, the source and sustaining force of all diverse life on earth (cf. AV 10.8.11).¹³ Skambha is second to none. Indeed, the progenitor, Prajāpati, is but a fraction of the cosmic mass. AV 10.7.26 says it mythically, yet succinctly: "When Skambha, generating, evolved the Ancient One¹⁴ then men knew by analogy the one limb of Skambha to be the Ancient One".

From the foregoing, it is evident that Skambha is the first creator who gives birth to the second, who in turn takes over the creation process. This way of conceptualizing the supreme creative force is not found in the RV. It is a schema to develop importantly in the Upaniṣads,¹⁵ the Mahābhārata¹⁶ and the Purāṇas.¹⁷ It is the ancestor to the well-known *vaiṣṇava* cosmogonic image of the demiurge Brahmā rising out of the navel¹⁸ of Nārāyaṇa (Viṣṇu-Anantaśayana).

Rohita, presumably omniform (*viśvarūpa*), generates both phenomenal forms and manifestations of himself, illustrating thereby Definitions 1 and 3 in the AV. Rohita refers to "the red" (ascending) sun. Though the term *rohita* ("the ruddy one") already appears in the RV, it is not applied directly to the sun. Rohita is, to a large extent, a solar deity and represents a poetic invention of the AV poets.

Of the four hymns to Rohita in AVŚ Book 13,¹⁹ his creative power is best developed in the initial hymn. The opening verse (i.e. 13.1) declares Rohita to be the supreme creator of the universe in that "he gave birth (*√jan*) to all this". The allusion to cosmic parturition is sustained in pāda 6a which says that Rohita gave birth (*√jan*) to heaven and earth. AV 13.2.26d also specifies that Rohita generates (*√jan*) these two spheres. In this way, Rohita continues to create and stabilize the universe. "Rohita stabilized heaven and earth, by him the celestial realm of light (*svār*) was firmly fixed, by him the vault of heaven (*nāka*) (was firmly fixed). By him the atmosphere (*antarikṣa*-) (and) the spaces (*rajas*-) were measured out; through him the gods found immortality" (AVŚ 13.1.7). The

¹³ AV 10.8.11: What stirs, flies, and what stands
What came into being breathing, not breathing, winking
That, Viśvarūpa, sustained the earth
That, combining Becomes just One.

¹⁴ The Ancient One is a name for Prajāpati.

¹⁵ Cf. N.N. Bhattacharyya, *History of Indian Cosmogonical Ideas*, New Delhi, 1971, p. 47.

¹⁶ Cf. 12.231–233 wherein creation of the universe is described in two stages. First Brahman creates the physical and psychical elements (intellect, mind) and then the five elements of ether, earth, water, fire, air. As these cannot advance the process of creation they continue to form the first organic body – Prajāpati. Prajāpati, the personal creator, then brings forth all living things.

¹⁷ E.g. *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*, transl. by H.H. Wilson, London, 1840, Book I, Chap. II.

¹⁸ The navel represents the center of the place of generation. Already in the AV, the middle is the place of the procreative source; Skambha as *yakṣa* is situated in the middle of the universe (AV 10.7.38, 10.8.15).

¹⁹ AVP has two Rohita hymns in Book XVIII and isolated verses in AVP Books 4 and 20.

significance of this verse lies in its clear description of the various cosmic spheres generated and maintained by Rohita. They are supported by the cosmography noticed in the Rig Vedic verses to Soma, discussed in Chapter 2. This cosmography represents the Saṃhitās' prevailing view on the structure of the organized world.

Having created the world's structure, Rohita continues, by cosmic parturition, to emit all phenomenal forms into the visible world. "Rohita has stood high above the *nāka* generating all forms (*viśvā rūpāṇi*), the young sage" (AVŚ 13.1.11). Presumably Rohita is *viśvarūpa* since he is able to generate *viśvā rūpāṇi*. He does this from the *svār*, the same transcendental region from which Soma generates forms of himself. Rohita's omniform nature is buttressed in another way; his own structure is said to be comprised of "a hundred bodies" (*tanū-*) in AVŚ 13.4.44, and of innumerable number of bodies, cf. AVŚ 13.4.45. The choice of the term *tanū-* is significant; *tanū-* refers to a corporeal body of a person, and it can also be used for a god's manifestation.²⁰ In AVŚ 13.4.44, where "a hundred" probably connotes "the total number" much like "a thousand",²¹ Rohita's capacity to generate all his manifestation(s) implies his being composed of all these divine forms. There is some indication that Rohita, like Soma and others in the RV, uses *māyā* to create forms. AVŚ 13.2.3 states that by means of *māyā* Rohita makes day and night of diverse forms (i.e. of different colours).

The verses to Rohita in the AV and to Soma in the RV convey notions on Vedic cosmography which interface with the multiplicity convention. Both position the omniform (*viśvarūpa*) creator in the region above the *nāka*, whence he emits forms into the regions below. It must be assumed that these notions express a fundamental Vedic theory on the origins of the phenomenal world (re: Definition 1), as well as the divine manifestations within the world (re: Definition 3). Whereas the verses to Soma, detailing these notions, exemplify Definition 3, those to Rohita pertain to both of the Definitions. The Rohita verses thus endorse the Rig Vedic cosmographic schema within which operates the multiplicity convention.

In addition, the Rohita material advances speculative positions which anticipate Upaniṣadic thought. One significant development is that Rohita is said to have made all that has soul (*ātman*; AVŚ 13.1.52). Another is that Rohita is identified as being *brāhman* (AVŚ 13.1.33). The idea that Rohita is a unifying principle is yet another; this is suggested in the last hymn of the Rohita series.

The combined evidence on the Cosmic Bull, Skambha and Rohita illustrates that Atharva Veda expands the Rig Vedic significance of divine multiple bodily parts and forms and

²⁰ *Tanū* connotes a particular manifestation or "aspect" of the divine in AVŚ 17.1.13. *Tanū* may also denote a body assumed by the deceased upon entering heaven (K.G. Geldner, *Der Rig Veda* Vol. III, Cambridge, 1951, ad. 10.15.14d). Cf. L. Renou, *EVP* IV, 1958, 20: "tanū est souvent... 'corps mystique'". Primarily however, the term designates the corporeal body of a person; A.B. Keith, *The Religion and Philosophy of the Veda and Upanishads*, Vol. II, Cambridge, 1925, p. 486. R.N. Dandekar ("God in Hindu Thought", *Annals of the Bhandarkar Oriental Res. Inst.*, Golden Jubilee Vol. 1968, p. 458), notes that *tanūs* are "appearances in certain specific aspects which later may be co-existent (this concept having been developed more particularly in Śaivism)".

²¹ See Chapter 2, fn. 8.

links conceptualizations to more advanced speculative positions. From the Skambha and Rohita hymns, it is seen that an omniform (*viśvarūpa-*) creator, who generates (*√jan*) creation by cosmic parturition, is identified with *brāhman*. Also *ātman* is identical to Skambha, and Rohita creates all that has *ātman*. Further, the omniform creator is a unifying force, the source of all phenomenality and the object of the search for knowledge into the underlying power of the universe. In propounding such thoughts, the Atharva Veda opens up the possibility that much of the significance of multiple bodily parts and forms, contained in the Saṃhitās, continues intact in the oldest Upaniṣadic material.

Of all the gods ascribed multiple bodily parts and forms in the Atharva Veda only Rudra (incorporated into Śiva) comes to be associated with the multiplicity convention in the early art. It is therefore important to keep a pulse on the developments of this god and his multiple bodily attributes.

Rudra is characterized by omniscience in the AV; the god is described with “a thousand eyes” (*sahasrākṣa*) more frequently than any other AV deity (AVŚ 11.2.3, 7, 17 = AVP 16.104 and 105 with variants for vs. 7). AVŚ 11.2.17 elaborates on Rudra’s infinite knowledge calling him “manifoldly wise” (*bahudhā vipāścīt*) and “overseeing all”.²² Bhava and Śarva, who in the Yajur Veda are absorbed into the godhead Rudra, but who remain separate though closely associated with him in the AV (e.g. AVŚ 11.2.14, 16) are likewise called “thousand eyed” (AVŚ 4.28.3; epithet omitted in AVP 4.37), possibly to accentuate their affinity to Rudra.

Rudra’s dominion over the world (of which he is “father” in RV 6.49.10, and “master” *īśāna* in RV 2.33.9) continues to be expounded in the AV. AVŚ 11.2.10, in addressing Rudra as Ugra (an epithet later applied to Śiva) states: “Thine are the four directions, thine is the sky, thine is the earth, O Ugra, thine is this spacious atmosphere. Thine is all this which has spirit (*ātman-*) and which is breathing upon earth”. As this verse shows, the AV assigns new dimensions to Rudra; the majestic side of Rudra becomes more pronounced (as does the destructive side, illustrated in other verses of this hymn). With this increase in stature, omniscience may well come to be ascribed to Rudra. It may also be the result of Rudra’s identification with Agni in the AV (e.g. AVŚ 7.87.1). The fusion of Agni-Rudra (important in the steady rise of Rudra) is an Atharvanic innovation. In the RV, omniscience is central to Agni’s nature and this trait causes Agni to have “a thousand eyes” (e.g. 10.79.5; 1.79.12; see Chapter 2, fn. 8). Perhaps as Agni and Rudra merge in the AV, Agni’s omniscience comes to be attributed to Rudra. It is certainly noteworthy in this connection that in the AV, Agni loses the attribute, and Rudra gets it – more frequently than any other god. “A thousand eyes” belong preeminently to Rudra.

There is no question but that Rudra is still a minor god in the AV; he is mentioned only 55 times in the hymns. However, his growing stature is discernible. One result seems to be Rudra’s intensified ambivalence; both heightened destructive and benign traits are ascribed to him. Another may be his identification with Agni whereby the

²² M. Bloomfield, *Hymns of the Atharva-Veda in Sacred Books of the East* 42, Repr. Delhi, 1964 p. 157.

quality of omniscience may have shifted over to Rudra. It must be underscored that the power of omniscience in the RV implies additional exaltedness. The Rig Vedic verses describing omniscient Varuṇa indicate that the all-knowing god is posited in an invisible sphere above the *nāka* wherefrom he “sees” transcendental things plus phenomenal things below.²³ It may be assumed that this conceptualization also adheres to omniscient Rudra in the AV, and that his station too is in the highest heaven. Indeed AVŚ 7.87.1 implies as much. Rudra’s station is in a heavenly region above the *nāka* wherefrom he transposes his power into earthly forms.²⁴ The image befits Rudra’s role as creator god in the RV and as a deity of increased majesty in the AV.

²³ See D.M. Srinivasan “Findings from the Rig Veda”, 152–153.

²⁴ AVŚ 7.87.1 (AVP 20.32 with variants), states that Rudra is in fire, within waters and has entered (*ā vviś*) herbs and plants. The verse thus testifies to the belief that Rudra’s transcendent power can be revealed in externality by transposing itself (i.e. “entering”) into a tangible form. The verb *ā vviś* is often used to describe the “entering” of a power into a phenomenal form; the form then constitutes the visible location wherein the power is manifested (i.e. *dhāman*). *Ā vviś* is frequently used in this manner to show the transposition of Soma’s power into the form of soma juice (see D.M. Srinivasan, “Findings from the Rig Veda”, 154).

CHAPTER FOUR

SO DOES THE YAJUR VEDA

Fewer gods are described with the multiplicity convention in the Yajur Veda (YV)¹ than in the other two Saṃhitās, but the meanings do not shift greatly. The Rig Vedic definitions still operate. The Saṃhitās speak with one voice on the meanings of divine multiple bodily parts and/or forms.

As in the Rig Veda, Tvaṣṭṛ continues to be a good example to illustrate that multiple bodily parts and forms are associated with a deity who creates the phenomenal world (Definition 1). Possessing multiforms (*pururūpa-*) is characteristic of Tvaṣṭṛ (cf. VS 28.9; VS 22.20), and according to TS 3.4.5a, this capacity seems to be his domain of power.² VS 28.32 indicates what happens to the forms he carries: "Let the Hotṛ (priest) worship Tvaṣṭṛ having ample semen, increasing growth, bearing forms (*rūpāni*)."³ The forms he bears he places into the wombs of earthly begettors. TS 6.5.8.4 notes that Tvaṣṭṛ "places form in animals", and according to TS 6.1.8.5, "Tvaṣṭṛ is the maker of the forms of offspring, of pairings; verily he places form in cattle".⁴

Indra continues to be a good example of multiple bodily parts and forms associated with a deity who projects manifestations into the phenomenal world (Definition 3). Indra's capacity to assume every form (*rūparūpa-*), already existing in the Rig Veda, occurs in the Yajur Veda as well (see VS 20.64). In TS 2.4.2, Indra names three of his bodies, or manifestations (*tanū-*): "He said, 'This is the *tanū* which frees from trouble; this is the *tanū* which drives off foes and this is the *tanū* which possesses strength.'"⁴

There are other occurrences of a divinity's multiple *tanū*-s which on that account provide indirect evidence that Definition 3 may be at work. Soma has raudraic *tanūs* (TS 2.1.11k) which may either be fearful manifestations, or, manifestations relating to the god Rudra. Perhaps both meanings are intended since Soma is closely allied to Rudra; Chapter 5; A, 1.5 explains that Soma – and – Rudra form a complimentary pair.

Multiple forms of Agni are mentioned in TS 4.2.10f; in TS 1.5.4 they are called his *tanū*. Most of the time when Agni's three forms are mentioned, the allusion is to the same forms as set forth in the Rig Veda, namely fire, lightning and the sun (cf. VS 12.19). Rig Vedic verses mentioning Agni's three bodies are readily repeated in the Yajus

¹ The discussion which follows is based on two YV recensions. They are the Taittirīya Saṃhitā (TS) of the Black Yajur Veda and the Vajasaneyi Saṃhitā (VS) of the White Yajur Veda. Material from the other three Saṃhitās of the Black Yajur Veda is mainly introduced in Table II, being a list of Rig Vedic parallel passages in the Yajur Veda. The list is limited to passages employing the multiplicity convention only.

² The passage cites various divinities and the spheres over which they exercise lordship. Thus Vāyu is overlord of the atmosphere, Sūrya of the sky . . . and Tvaṣṭṛ of forms.

³ A.B. Keith, *The Veda of the Black Yajus School*, Pt. 2, Second Issue, Delhi, 1967 p. 497.

⁴ Cf. KS 10.10; MS 2.2.5.10.

(e.g. RV 3.20.2⁵ = TS 3.2.11; cf. TS 2.4.1 = MS 2.4.4abc: 42.10; 4.12.5:191:11). However, the Yajur Veda also contains a new set of symbolic equivalents. In a legend alluded to in VS 5.8 and TS 1.2.11f, Agni burnt the Asuras' three castles which are distributed in three regions. The one on earth is of iron, the one in the atmosphere is of silver, and the one in the sky is of gold. When Agni burnt these, they became his three bodies.⁶ Interestingly, Agni is also associated with the number "seven" in such a way as to confirm the ritual connections of this number. Agni is attributed seven tongues⁷ in a passage repeated with other "sevens" taken from the ritual arena (TS 1.5.3h = VS 17.79 = TS 4.6.5n; cf. TS 1.5.2; TS 5.4.7): "Seven are thy kindling-sticks, O Agni, seven thy tongues; seven seers, seven dear abodes, seven priesthoods, sevenfold sacrifice to thee; seven birth-places with ghee do thou fill".⁸ Agni's tongue is recognized as the symbolic equivalent of his "flame", but as there are not seven sacrificial fires the symbolism is not immediately apparent. The Brāhmaṇa sections pertaining to the Yajus passages shed some light. Agni's *tanūs*, states TS 1.5.4, are sevenfold. The image of Agni's seven bodies may be coupled with the belief that in the beginning the Ṛṣis created seven separate persons; out of the seven they made one Person who became Prajāpati (cf. ŚB 9.2.3.44–51). This Person who became Prajāpati is Agni, that is, the seven-layered fire-altar being built in the Agnicayana (cf. ŚB 6.1.1.5–6). It may therefore be conjectured that Agni's seven tongues represent the seven layers of the fire-altar, and that the symbolic connection between "tongue" and "fire" is effectively maintained.⁹

Definition 2 could apply to the omniform Womb in VS 31.19, since it seems to be a passive creative entity. VS 31.19 speaks of the primordial Womb as the source of Prajāpati:

Prajāpati moves inside the womb (*garbha*) [though] unborn he comes into existence manifoldly. The wise ones perceive his source (*yonī*) in which remained all living creatures.

Since the Womb contains all living creatures, it may be deduced that the Womb is filled with the totality of forms and thereby it can be characterized as omniform or "Viśvarūpa". It follows that the Womb must also be the source of the agent of creation, Prajāpati; but he is "not born" from the Womb though he "moves" inside of the Womb. Perhaps the meaning is that Prajāpati is the stimulator of his own birth. He is the active creator; the Womb is passive, receiving the stimulation to create.¹⁰ If this interpretation is correct, then the Womb is passive during its own generative activity, and fulfills the conditions of

⁵ See Chapter 2, p. 30 on this verse.

⁶ TS 1.2.11f adds a "highest" form which remains in hiding.

⁷ Note that RV 3.6.2 also speaks of Agni's "seven tongued team", which may refer to his flames. Cf. D.M. Srinivasan, "Findings from the Rig Veda", 161, fn. 98. Likewise, the AV contains references to the seven tongues of Agni. See D.M. Srinivasan, "Multiple Bodily Parts in the Atharva Veda", 204. It must be quickly added that three tongues are of course the more usual number for Agni to have; they represent the flames in the three sacrificial fire altars (see TS 3.2.11 = RV 3.20.2).

⁸ Keith, *Veda of the Black Yajus*, p. 71.

⁹ The Agnicayana fire-altar contains two small additional layers on top of the five layers of the altar. See ŚB 6.6.1.14.

¹⁰ Note that Prajāpati stands in the same relation to the Womb in the Yajur Veda as to the omniform Pillar (Skambha) in the Atharva Veda. In fact VS 31.19ab is nearly identical to AV 10.8.13ab, being a hymn to Skambha. However, the Womb is less directly involved in creation and more abstract in conceptualization than Skambha.

Definition 2. The Womb in this Yajus verse is an ulterior source devoid of any anthropomorphism. It is “a place”, or better “a container filled with life” The conceptualization of the filled vessel is destined to become a significant image in the Upaniṣads and in early Indian art. The primordial Womb conceived as the highest cosmic power anticipates Upaniṣadic thought in another way. The Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad, for example, postulates a primordial Womb wherein resides none other than the god Rudra (cf. 2.16).¹¹ Of course, when the Yajus stipulates the Womb as the highest cosmic source, it confirms the continuity of the belief in cosmic parturition – the *sine qua non* for the multiplicity convention.

Another harbinger of things to come is the way the Yajur Veda assigns feelings to Prajāpati. He is a creator who has feelings towards his creations. The TS 5.5.2.1 states that Prajāpati, having emitted creatures, was motivated by love (*preṇā*) to follow them and enter into them. But he was not able to extricate himself from them, and therefore he could not return to wholeness. The myth occurs in the section commenting on the piling of the fire altar (i.e. the Agnicayana) and reminds of the way Prajāpati's cosmic body is reconstructed in the Agnicayana, after having fallen apart due to the energy expounded during creation.

The first conclusion to be drawn from all these Yajus examples is that the three RV definitions retain validity probably because 1) quite a number of the same gods in the YV, RV and AV are associated with the multiplicity convention; 2) there are repetitions in the YV of multiplicity passages from the RV Saṃhitā (see Table II), 3) some of the new Yajus entities associated with the multiplicity concept relate or develop quite naturally from multiform concepts in the other Saṃhitās, and 4) the mainstay for postulating the multiplicity convention, namely belief in creation as an act of cosmic parturition, abides.

It must be mentioned that the Yajur Veda formulates an even more abstract concept than the Womb to express the container from which cosmic parturition originates. VS 32.8 describes a sage who beholds the One (*tat*, neuter), which resides in secret. Tat is the storehouse of all phenomenality. Being neuter, it is above and beyond the dichotomies of male and female, and, by implication, it is omniform. It is the One which holds all in place, presumably until the time to release all material forms. Tat, the neuter storehouse, is a descendent of the semi-anthropomorphic pillar called Skambha and a precursor of the fullness of Brahman in the Upaniṣads.

Now is the time to state that of all the multiplicity references in the Taittirīya Saṃhitā (TS) and the Vajasaneyi Saṃhitā (VS), two gods draw to themselves half of the references (see Table I). Who are they? Agni and Rudra. There is considerable connective tissue, as it were, between them. Sometimes Agni and Rudra are identified, sometimes they are attributed quite similar multiple bodily parts and forms.¹² But they are not of

¹¹ See Chapter 9, p. 99.

¹² For example, Agni has a thousand eyes, plus a hundred heads in TS 4.6.5g (= VS 17.71), and Rudra has “a thousand” or “a hundred” eyes; See TS 4.5.1 = VS 16.13, TS 4.5.1i = VS 16.8, TS 4.5.5e = VS 16.29.

equal stature. Rudra is on the ascent, as the Śatarudrīya litany, in both the TS and VS (TS 4.5 = VS 16), undeniably demonstrates.

Rudra in the Śatarudrīya litany overwhelms. The name given to the litany announces that homage is given to the Viśvarūpa form of Rudra. “Śatarudrīya” means “hundred forms of Rudra”. “Hundred”, like “a thousand” symbolically refers to the total number¹³ – in this case – of the forms of Rudra. Thereby, the name of the litany indicates that praise is bestowed upon the totality of Rudra’s powers. “The categories of men and animals, trees and herbs, mountains, rivers, their streams, rapids, whirlpools and still water, clouds and rain, thunder and lightening, breeze and gale, hailstorm – in fact all come under *viśvarūpa* of the Lord as glorified in the Śatarudrīya”.¹⁴ All categories, including mutually exclusive groups, can arise from the two bodies (*tanū*) of Viśvarūpa Rudra. Benign and beneficial materiality can proceed from Rudra’s kindly, auspicious body; fearful and destructive materiality can come from his wrathful body.¹⁵ Fashioning thus all the good and bad in the world, Rudra claims lordship over everything. Rudra’s all-encompassing potency inspires, no doubt, the fervent devotionism which permeates the Śatarudrīya litany.

The bond between Rudra and Agni is the crux for performance of the Śatarudrīya.¹⁶ The litany, it is explained, needs to be performed to appease the fearful form of Agni which is Rudra. TS 1.2.11e mentions that Agni’s fearful body is called *rudriyā tanūs*, or Agni’s body relating to Rudra. And again in TS 1.3.14a it is said “You O Agni are Rudra, the Asura of the great sky . . .” It now becomes clear why there is a strong connection between these two gods and why they can have similar multiplicity attributes. Like Rudra, Agni has a bipolar nature, composed of an auspicious (*śiva*) and a fearful (*ghora*) aspect. The radical opposition of Agni’s two bodies is acknowledged by the words of the Adhvaryu (priest) who in TS 4.2.3c (= VS 12.32) intones: “O brilliant Agni, approach with [your] auspicious rays; shining with [your] great lights, harm not our progeny with your body (*tanuvā*). The terminology used, reminds us of Rudra’s bipolar bodies. Indeed Agni’s auspicious rays are called *śiva- arcis*-. ”

This survey of the Saṃhitās concludes on a note of consistency. The Rig Veda shows that three definitions can explain the usages of the multiplicity convention in that text. The Atharva Veda basically sustains, as well as expands, upon these definitions. So too does the Yajur Veda. The foundation for the significance of the convention has been laid. The Saṃhitās have established it by means of biological symbolism, spurred on by sacred knowledge (*veda*) about the beginnings of things.

¹³ See Chapter 2, fn. 8. The equivalency operating between *sahasra* (a thousand) and *viśva* (all, total) is well brought out in TS 4.2.10a and VS 13.41. Herein Agni, called Āditya, is described as omniform (*viśvarūpa*), and he is creator of a thousand [forms] (*sahasrasya pratimām*). The idea is that Agni can create a thousand, or, the total number of forms because he is in possession of all forms.

¹⁴ C. Sivaramamurti, *Śatarudrīya, Vibhūti of Śiva’s Iconography*, New Delhi, 1967, p. 61.

¹⁵ See Chapter 5 on Rudra-Śiva’s two bodies, i.e. his *śiva* and his *ugra* or *ghora* bodies.

¹⁶ Further discussion on the linkages between Agni and Rudra are in Chapter 5.1.4.

TABLE I
Deities and Their Multiplicity Passages in the Yajur Veda

| | |
|-----------------|--|
| Agni*: | TS 1.1.7b = VS 1.17; TS 1.2.11e; TS 1.2.11f; TS 1.5.3h = VS 17.79 = TS 4.6.5n, cf. TS 1.5.2; TS 2.5.8; TS 3.2.11 (cf. TS 2.4.11; MS 2.4.4abc: 42.10; 4.12.5:191:11); TS 4.2.3c = VS 12.32; TS 4.2.10a; TS 4.2.10b = VS 13.47; TS 4.2.10f = VS 13.49; TS 4.6.5g = VS 17.71; TS 5.4.7; TS 5.7.3.3; VS 5.8; VS 12.19; VS 13.41; VS 15.36. |
| Aryaman: | TS 2.3.14t |
| Indra: | TS 1.2.4k = VS 4.19; TS 2.4.2 (cf. KS 10.10; MS 2.2.5.10; BSS 13.35); VS 20.64 |
| Mitra-Varuṇa: | MS 2, 3, 1:27; 15ff.; ¹⁷ MSS 5, 2, 1, 3ff. |
| Nirṛti: | TS 4.2.5g |
| Rudra: | TS 4.5.1c; TS 4.5.1i = VS 16.8; TS 4.5.1 = VS 16.13; TS 4.5.4f; TS 4.5.5e = VS 16.29; VS 3.60 ≡ TS 1.8.6h, i |
| Soma*: | TS 2.1.11k; VS 8.30 = TS 3.3.10f |
| The Hidden One: | VS 32.8 |
| Tvaṣṭṛ*: | TS 3.4.5; TS 6.5.8.4 (cf. TS 6.1.8.5); VS 22.20; VS 28.9; VS 28.32 |
| Viśvarūpa: | TS 2.5.1.1; KS 12.10; MS 2.4.1 |

* See additional YV passages in Table II, below.

TABLE II
RV Multiplicity Passages Repeated in the YV

| YV Passage | RV Passage | God |
|---|------------|-------------|
| 1. TS 3.1.11aa = MS 2.13.11 | 3.20.3 | Agni |
| 2. TS 4.4.4r = VS 15.36 = SV 1.99; 2.912 | 1.79.5 | Agni |
| 3. TS 3.1.11 = MS 4.13.10 | 1.13.10 | Tvaṣṭṛ |
| 4. VS 33.22 | 3.38.4 | Asura |
| 5. VS 17.90 ≡ MS 1.6.2 = KS 40.7 | 4.58.2 | Soma(?) |
| 6. VS 17.91 = MS 1.6.2 = KS 17.90 | 4.58.3 | Soma(?) |
| 7. MS 1.5.13 | 7.55.1 | Vaṣṭospati |
| 8. VS 31.1 (with variations) | 10.90.1 | Puruṣa |
| 9. VS 17.19 | 10.81.3 | Viśvakarman |
| 10. TS 2.2.12.5 MS 4.10.1:144.4, 5 SV 2.975 (with variations) | 7.100.6 | Viṣṇu |
| 11. MS 4.12.1:177.14, 15 AV 20.88.4; KS 11.13 | 4.50.4 | Bṛhaspati |

¹⁷ They have four *tanū*-s. The first is characterized by generative and inaugurative power (*ojasyā*); the second by victorious and overwhelming power (*sahasyā*), the third by counteracting witchcraft (*yāṭasyā*), and the last by counteracting demons (*rakṣasyā*). J. Gonda, *The Dual Deities in the Religion of the Veda*, in *Verhandelingen der Koninklijke Nederlandse Akademie van Wetenschappen, Afd. Letterkunde Nieuwe Reeks, Deel 81*, Amsterdam, London, 1974, p. 189. Cf. W. Caland, *Altindische Zauberei*. Repr. Wiesbaden, 1968, p. 103.

Cont. (Table II):

| YV Passage | RV Passage | God |
|---|------------|---|
| 12. MS 4.14.4:219.13; 4.14.4:220 1; KS 17.18 | 7.97.7 | Br̥haspati |
| 13. TS 4.6.8.1 VS 25.25 KSA 6.4; MS 3.16.1: 181.9; 3.16.1:181.10 | 1.162.2 | Goat (it is viśvarūpa & sacrificed in the Aśvamedha) |

CHAPTER FIVE

THEORY CON'T: VEDIC RUDRA-ŚIVA

We are not done with theory. Interpretations of early *śaiva* forms with multiple bodily parts and/or forms are based on the theory that Hindu Śiva and the icons representing him grow out of Vedic notions and experiences, especially those associated with Vedic Rudra-Śiva. Part of the theory contends that Rudra-Śiva stems more from within the Vedic tradition than from outside of it. Evidence to support that contention constitutes the main part of this chapter. From the evidence it follows that Vedic Rudra-Śiva could relate to Hindu Śiva as Vedism, or ancient Hinduism, relates to Hinduism proper. The relationship is a direct one. Hindu Śiva seems to develop directly from Vedic Rudra-Śiva, though outside influences may have contributed to the primarily, internal development. This is the theoretical underpinning for the priority given to Vedic notions in trying to understand the forms and meanings associated with Śiva's images. Without recognition that this theory is at work throughout the book, both the method of approach, and the interpretations themselves would not fall into place. A demonstration of the application of the theory closes the chapter; an analysis of the Vedic antecedents for the Ardhanārīśvara concept is presented together with interpretations of early Śiva Ardhanārīśvara images which take into account the Vedic material.

Belief in the predominantly Vedic nature of Rudra-Śiva stems from the way his character relates to that of several important Vedic gods, and the way in which his function relates to the Vedic sacrifice. To anticipate what is to follow, Rudra-Śiva's ambivalent nature together with his ability to safeguard the perpetuation of the Vedic ritual place him within the mainstream of Vedic religious thought. During the entire period preceding the advent of *śaiva* art, neither the god nor the dominant features associated with him can, at the present state of our knowledge, be placed as well into another system of thought or culture. Two other systems of culture can be considered in this context. The first is the pre-Vedic Indus Valley Civilization. Even though the writing on the Indus seals remains undeciphered, there is sufficient evidence from the Indus material remains to indicate that a proto-Rudra-Śiva does not originate from this civilization (see Chapter 13). The second system would pertain to that of the Dāsas, a group in the Rig Veda who are distinguished from the Vedic Aryans in that text. The main criteria of distinction between the two groups are neither race (i.e. colour) or language, but rather culture.¹ A socio-religious distinction is made between the Aryans of the Rig Veda and the Dāsas. Since Rudra-Śiva expresses basic Aryan religious notions in the

¹ See G. Erdosy, "Ethnicity in the Rigveda and its Bearing on the Question of Indo-European Origins", *South Asian Studies* 5, 1989, 35ff.

Rig, as well as the other Saṃhitās, as will be shown below, it is unlikely that he represents a deity connected with their enemies, the Dāsas.

A

Rudra-Śiva and the Vedic Pantheon

The types of gods sharing significant features with Rudra-Śiva are the most well-known among Vedic divinities. Their traits may be found in the standard surveys on Vedic religion and mythology.² The ensuing discussion extracts, from a detailed analysis published elsewhere,³ the features that Rudra-Śiva has in common with Vedic gods.

1. *Varuṇa and Mitra-Varuṇa*

An ambiguous nature well recognized as the integral feature of Rudra's divinity also characterizes Varuṇa and Mitra-Varuṇa. With respect to Rudra, the union of opposites is expressed throughout the Vedas by breaking up his twofold nature into further refractions. The Rig Veda already recognizes the ambiguities; he is described not only as *ugra* ("powerful, formidable" RV 2.33.9, 11), but also as *mīdhvas* ("the bounteous one"⁴ RV 1.114.3), *śiva* ("auspicious" RV 10.92.9) and having a merciful hand (*mṛṣayākur hasta* RV 2.33.7). By the time of the Śatarudrīya hymn, his twofold nature becomes his two "bodies" (*tanū* i.e. manifestations). One body is *śiva*, not terrible (*aghora* TS 4.5.1c); the other is, by implication, wrathful (*manyu* cf. TS 4.5.1a). These qualifiers are used in the god's worship; he is Ugra (The powerful One) and Bhīma (The fearful One, see TS 4.5.8c), as well as Śiva and Śivatara (The more auspicious One TS 4.5.81), in the chants of the Śatarudrīya litany occurring in the Agnicayana ritual.

It has not been sufficiently emphasized that Varuṇa, like Rudra, is an ambiguous god. Varuṇa has some awesome qualities in common with Rudra. Varuṇa, the punisher of sinful man, can show wrath (*manyu* RV 1.24.6). Varuṇa also has a gracious aspect; he can be merciful (*√mṛṣ* RV 7.89.1-4) and grant forgiveness (cf. 7.89.5). Just as Rudra's auspicious aspect dwells on his healing powers (RV 2.33.2; VS 3.59 = TS 1.8.6g) so is Varuṇa the lord of physicians (VS 21.40) who has a hundred, a thousand remedies, who can drive away death (RV 1.24.9), increase a life-span (RV 1.25.12) or take it away (RV 1.24.11).

And as Rudra is associated with the North (e.g. ŚB 2,6,2,5 and 7; 5,4,2,10), so too is the dual deity, Mitra-Varuṇa, repeatedly associated with the North in the Saṃhitās and Brāhmaṇas.⁵ Since the vast majority of Vedic gods abide in the East, the place of the

² E.g. H. Oldenberg, *Die Religion des Vedas* (Stuttgart, Berlin 1923); A.A. Macdonell, *Vedic Mythology*, repr., Varanasi, 1968; A. Bergaigne, *La Religion Védique*, 3 Vols. (36, 53, 54 in Bibliothèque de l'École des Hautes Études), Paris, 1878-1883; J. Gonda, *Die Religionen Indiens I*, Stuttgart, 1960.

³ See D.M. Srinivasan, "Vedic Rudra-Śiva", *JAOS* Vol. 103.3, 1983, 543-556.

⁴ See J. Gonda, *Epithets in the Rgveda*, The Hague, 1959, p. 127.

⁵ J. Gonda, *The Dual Deities in the Religion of the Veda* in *Verhandelingen der Koninklijke Nederlandse Akademie van Wetenschappen*, Afd. Letterkunde, Nieuwe Reeks, Deel 81, Amsterdam, London, 1974, 191-192.

rising sun, the regularity with which Rudra and Mitra-Varuṇa are consigned to the North is somewhat unusual.

Another shared characteristic is receipt of a sacrificial offering which is less than perfect. Rudra may receive that which is injured (ŚB 1,7,4,9). Mitra and Varuṇa may be proffered a barren cow. ŚB 4,5,1,6 explains that Mitra takes the well-offered part of a sacrifice and Varuṇa the ill-offered part.⁶

Lastly, the power of omniscience is attributed both to Rudra and Varuṇa by way of referring to their all-comprehensive sight (i.e. knowledge). Thus Varuṇa is ascribed "a thousand eyes" in the Rig Veda (7.34.10) and the Atharva Veda continues to assume the god's capacity for total knowledge.⁷ As for Rudra, he is described as having "a thousand eyes" more frequently than any other deity in the Atharva Veda,⁸ and the Śatarudrīya continues to mention this particular attribute (TS 4.5.1i; 1i; 5e).

It may be assumed that the considerable number of shared characteristics between these gods implies some sort of conceptual link. Indeed, this linkage seems to be affirmed in one Rig Vedic hymn (5.70), where the noun *rudrā-* is repeatedly applied to the dual deity Mitra-Varuṇa.

For our purposes, the most interesting aspect of this comparative data is its cultural implications. Varuṇa and Mitra-Varuṇa can be traced to the well-known inscription of the Mitanni Aryans. It mentions side by side Mitra and Aruna (generally understood to signify Varuṇa); thus the Aryan historicity of these two gods in the Middle East dates to 1380 B.C. Further, the possibility of an Indo-Iranian background for Varuṇa and Mitra has received consistent notice.⁹ The Aryan antiquity of these gods has significant bearing upon the problem of Rudra's cultural source. The first conclusion to be drawn is that in the earliest stratum of Vedic texts, the Saṃhitās, Rudra shares numerous features with deities who are not only important in the Saṃhitās, but whose Aryan roots extend outside of the Rig Veda Saṃhitā. Second, the shared features are central to Rudra's nature. The possibility thus arises that some primary Vedic Aryan traits may belong to Rudra from the outset.

1.2 *Indra*

Several of the similarities between Rudra and Indra are the same as those between Rudra and Varuṇa and Mitra-Varuṇa. Indra too has a kindly and a fearful side, distinguished by terminology already noted for Rudra's two aspects. This makes it possible that Indra (whose ability to project phenomenal manifestations is affirmed in the Saṃhitās)¹⁰ can emit outer manifestations (*rūpa; tanū*) of a bipolar nature. Indeed the twofold nature of his manifestations is indicated in RV 1.4.1 which speaks of Indra's "auspicious or good form"

⁶ Gonda, *Dual Deities*, p. 195.

⁷ See Doris Meth Srinivasan, "The Religious Significance of Multiple Bodily Parts to Denote the Divine: Findings from the Rig Veda", *Asiatische Studien* Vol. XXIX.2, 1975; 151-152; Doris Meth Srinivasan, "The Religious Significance of Divine Multiple Bodily Parts in the Atharva Veda", *Numen*, Vol. XXV.3, 1979; 198-199.

⁸ See Chapter 3, p. 39.

⁹ Gonda, *Dual Deities*, p. 163, p. 169.

¹⁰ See Chapter 2, p. 26 and Srinivasan, "Multiple Bodily Parts in the Atharva Veda", 201-202, especially fns. 41 and 42. Note also TS 2.4.2.

(*surūpa*), and verse 10 of RV 8.85/96 describes him as both *ugra* as well as *śivatama* ("most auspicious"). Indra too has an ambivalent relation to the Vedic ritual, resulting no doubt from his dreadful act of killing a Brahman and his subsequent exclusion from the Soma rite (TS 2.4.12). Analogous exclusions occur in the mythology of Rudra. The Taittirīya Saṃhitā indicates that the gods barred Rudra from the sacrifice (2.6.8.2), and the Aitareya Brāhmaṇa (3.34) recounts how the gods deprived Rudra of his part of the offering. These Vedic accounts are no doubt forerunners of the well-known epic legend of Śiva's exclusion from Dakṣa's sacrifice (MBh. 12.274.2–58).

Indra and Rudra share a number of physical similarities. Noteworthy in the present context is that both are thousand-eyed (*sahasrākṣa* Indra-Vāyu in RV 1.23.3; Rudra in AVŚ 11.23.7, 17; TS 4.5.5e; ŚB 9.1.1.6 etc.) and golden-armed (*hiranyabāhu* Indra in RV 7.34.4; Rudra in TS 4.5.2a).

The importance of these similarities lies in Indra's unquestionable Vedic importance and Aryan position. Indra's popularity and centrality in the earliest Indo-Aryan hymnal, the Rig Veda, is too well known to warrant further elaboration. The occurrence of references to an Indra in the Avesta also needs little repetition.¹¹ The deity also occurs in the Middle East of the 14th century B.C.; an Indara (Indra) is mentioned immediately after Mitra and Aruna on the Mitanni inscription. As such, Rudra is again seen as having numerous features in common with a deity of the most ancient Aryan stock.

1.3 Vāyu

It may be noted in passing that the minor Vedic wind god, Vāyu, whose Indo-Iranian prehistory is well attested, may also have an auspicious and inauspicious nature.¹² The cumulative evidence, based on the above brief survey of Vāyu, Indra, Varuṇa and Mitra-Varuṇa strongly indicates that Rudra's pronounced ambivalence, the hallmark of his Vedic "personality" is in actuality a trait he shares with the oldest of Vedic gods.

1.4 Agni

The strongest bonds exist between Rudra and Agni. Agni too has a gracious side as well as a fearful side, evidenced by terminology used in connection with the bipolar nature of Rudra et al. Agni is *śiva* in RV 7.34.15; 4.11.6; *ghora* in RV 4.6.6; *aghora* in the Gopatha Brāhmaṇa (1.2.18.2). The dual character of Agni's manifestations is accepted as a religious reality from the Rig Veda onwards.¹³ Accordingly, knowledge of Agni's fundamental polarities pervades the Yajur Veda. For example, the VS (12.32 = TS 4.2.3c) recognizes that Agni's flames can be both auspicious and harmful.¹⁴

¹¹ But the relationship between Vedic and Avestan Indra is problematic. Cf. H. Lommel, *Die Religion Zarathustras*, Tübingen, 1930, pp. 50, 91ff.; Gonda, *Religionen Indiens* I, p. 60; J. Duchesne-Guillemin, *La religion de l'Iran ancien*, Paris 1962, pp. 176ff.

¹² For Vāyu's bipolar nature, see Srinivasan "Vedic Rudra-Śiva" 548. Cf. Gonda, *Dual Deities*, p. 222. Cf. also J. Duchesne-Guillemin, "De la Dicéphalie dans l'Iconographie Mazdénne", *Festgabe für Herman Lommel*, ed. B. Schlerath, Wiesbaden, 1960, pp. 32–37.

¹³ For an excellent survey of Agni's dual character in the Vedas, see Sukumari Bhattacharji, *The Indian Theogony*, Cambridge, 1970, pp. 187ff.

¹⁴ Chapter 4, p. 44 discusses this passage. Another example is VS 17.11 (TS 4.2.3c).

The bond between Rudra and Agni rests on more than a common bipolarism: one of Agni's aspects is in fact Rudra himself.¹⁵ TS 2.2.2.3 says it quite clearly: "Rudra indeed is his [i.e. Agni's] fearful body" (*ghora tanūr*). TS 5.7.3.3 expands upon the identity of the two; "Agni is indeed Rudra. Two are his bodies, the one fearful (*ghora*), the other auspicious (*śiva*). When he offers the Śatarudrīya, he pacifies with it (i.e. the Śatarudrīya) his fearful body . . ." This passage not only identifies Rudra as Agni's fearful form or aspect, it also specifies that the Śatarudrīya offering functions to appease the *ghora* aspect. The offering accompanied by the litany addressed to the hundred Rudra forms (lit. *śatarudrīya*) is done upon completion of the Fire Altar, the Agnicayana. The brāhmaṇa portion (TS 5.4.3.1) belonging to the TS Śatarudrīya (in 4.5) opens with the same pronouncement, namely that Agni is Rudra, born when the fire altar has been completely piled up; TS 5.5.7.4 reiterates their identity.

Some of the multiplicity references which Agni and Rudra have in common imply that a fusing between the two is taking place (See also Chapter 3). Agni is "thousand-eyed and hundred headed" in VS 17.71 (= TS 4.6.5g) just as Rudra is in ŚB 9.1.1.6. Further, Agni's eight forms have names in ŚB 6.1.3.1–19 that can be closely associated or identified with Rudra.¹⁶ Already in the Kauṣītaki Brāhmaṇa, all eight names given to Puruṣa-Mahādeva indicate the *śaiva* nature of the god.¹⁷

Significant in the present context is the extent of the correlation and/or fusion between Rudra and Agni, who is the personification of the sacrificial fire. In effect, the affinities between the two gods relate Rudra to the very heart of Vedism. In addition, Agni is known to Aryans migrating to the Near East as he seems to have been borrowed by the Hittites from the Aryans.

1.5 Soma

Rudra has a special relation to the god Soma, who manifests himself in the most important Vedic sacrificial offering, the soma juice. Soma is the only god to join as dual deity with Rudra in the Rig Veda (hymn 6.74). Possibly the formation of the dual divinity, Somārudrā, promotes Rudra's epithet, Lord of the soma juice (VS 16.47 = TS 4.5.10a) in the Śatarudrīya litany. In addition, the litany continues to assume a close connection between the two gods in that homage to both deities is given in the same verse (VS 16.39 = TS 4.5.8a). Soma, in his own right, also has both a *ghora*-form (e.g. RV 9.89.4) as well as a *mīdhvas* aspect (RV 8.79.9; 9.61.23; 9.85.4). Thus Soma joins the several gods already mentioned in having an ambivalent character.

Rudra thus forms a unit with Soma, the god intimately connected with the Vedic ritual. Indeed, the Soma sacrifice is the central Vedic, nay Indo-Iranian sacramental act. Moreover, it has been argued that the phenomenon of forming copulative compounds should be understood as an Indo-European desire to express the twofold character of

¹⁵ A. Hillebrandt (*Vedische Mythologie* II, reprint of the second edition [Hildesheim, 1965] 447, fn. 1) had already proposed that Rudra is really a form of Agni on the basis of AV 7.87.1; AV 19.55.5; RV 4.3.1 etc.

¹⁶ The names are: Rudra, Sarva, Paśupati, Ugra, Aśani, Bhava, Mahādeva or Mahān devaḥ and Īśāna. ŚB 1.7.3.8 states that Agni is called "Sarva among the eastern people and Bhava among the Bāhikas."

¹⁷ See Chapter 7, pp. 76–77.

fundamental ideas by way of complementary dualities.¹⁸ Rudra's inclusion in a Vedic expression of this Indo-European feature is also pertinent to our line of inquiry.

When the above evidence is assembled together, some dominant themes emerge which it will be important to emphasize. The set of divinities sharing characteristics with Rudra stem from the oldest stratum of the Vedic religion and reach also into the Indo-Iranian or Mitanni Aryan context, or both. As such, if Rudra were to be considered predominantly as an outsider to the Vedic tradition, some reason must be given to explain why an "outsider god" has the greatest affinity with the most Aryan of the Vedic gods.

These Vedic gods also share with Rudra the capacity for ambivalent action. The trait usually believed to set Rudra apart from the other Vedic gods, is, on closer inspection, a trait he shares with a set of awesome Vedic divinities. Therefore, Rudra's ambivalent nature cannot be used to isolate Rudra from other Vedic gods in order to support the idea that he is alien to the Vedic tradition.

B

Rudra-Śiva and the Vedic Sacrifice

There is every indication that Rudra is not peripheral to the Vedic sacrifice (*yajña*). The god is addressed as "promoter of the sacrifice" (RV 1.114.4), "Rudra of the sacrifices" (*rudraṃ yajñānām*, RV 3.2.5d). RV 4.3.1ab emphasizes the same notions in precise ritualistic language: "... king of the sacrifices, Rudra, the priest of both worlds, true sacrificer." In the Śatarudrīya litany, Rudra is styled "the wearer of the sacred thread" (*upavītin* TS 4.5.2e), tantamount to fitness for inclusion in the Vedic rites; he is paid homage by those possessing *havis* (TS 4.5.10f = TS 3.4.11h = RV 1.114.8), the most common term for the ritual oblation; he is addressed as "the one of the holy spot" (*tīrthya* TS 4.5.8m = VS 16.42 which may have already connoted "a holy bathing spot", see TS 6.1.1.1-2).¹⁹ Thus when the later Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad (3.4; 4.12) calls Śiva a "maharṣi" or great seer especially in relation to the Vedic tradition, the appellation does seem to build upon such associations as just outlined.

Turning next to the specific Vedic rituals performed to honor Rudra, these are relatively few. Certain *grhya* rites, such as the Śūlagava and the Baudhyavihāra, wherein Rudra has a dominant role, can be described as agricultural festivals.²⁰ The main *śrauta* rites dedicated to Rudra are the Tryambaka Homa and the Śatarudrīya sacrifices. Of interest here is the status of these rituals within the Vedic textual corpus. The Tryambaka rite, essentially for increase in wealth and for gaining a husband has a place in almost all the four Vedic *sākhās*. The Śatarudrīya litany and sacrifice enjoyed wide popularity in the

¹⁸ See Gonda, *Dual Deities*, Chapter I, especially pp. 32-33.

¹⁹ Cf. P.V. Kane, *History of Dharmaśāstra*, Vol. IV, Poona, 1953, p. 554.

²⁰ For a description of these rites see A.B. Keith, *The Religion and Philosophy of the Veda and Upanishads* Vol. II, reprint. Delhi, 1976, pp. 364-365. R.N. Dandekar ("Rudra in the Veda", *Journal of Poona University*, Vol. II, 1953, 98) mentions some other *grhya* rites wherein Rudra plays a prominent role.

texts of the Yajur Veda.²¹ The centrality of the Śatarudrīya within the Yajur Veda school is recognized in a passage of the Mahābhārata (13.14.15f.) which reads: "Of birds thou art Garuḍa, among the snakes Ananta, of the Vedas the Sāmaveda and of the Yajuses the Śatarudrīya . . . That means that Śiva himself could . . . be identified with the text which is devoted to him and which is, at the same time, declared to be the best or most excellent component part of the whole Vedic corpus to which it belongs."²²

We may therefore conclude that those śrauta rituals belonging to Rudra-Śiva, though few and outside the mainstream of the soma cult, can claim extensive incorporation into the Vedas, especially the Yajur Veda.

By far the most significant indicator of Rudra's position in the Vedic ritual is his relation to the sacrificial remainder. The residue of the offering is, in effect, claimed as rightfully belonging to Rudra in two early stories about Nābhānediṣṭha. In the Taittirīya Saṃhitā account (TS 3.1.9.4-6), and the version in the Aitareya Brāhmaṇa (5.14), Rudra lays claim to the offering that is left over. With much the same insistence on "what is left at the site" (*vāstu*), the god demands, in another myth, the animals first created from the charred residue of the fire used to protect the creator's fecundating seed. (Aitareya Brāhmaṇa 3.33-34.)

As if to elucidate upon this claim of Rudra's which is in the nature of an absolute truth, the Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa contains a myth explaining when and why Rudra received this specific ritual portion. When the gods ascended to heaven by means of the ritual, Rudra was left behind at the site (ŚB 1.7.3.1ff.); "hence they call him Vāstavya, for he was then left behind on the (sacrificial) site (*vāstu*)."²³ Realizing that he had been excluded, he rose up on the North and insisted upon inclusion in the rite and a share of the oblation (ŚB 1.7.3.4). Thereupon the gods instructed the Adhvaryu priest to render once more the offerings fit for ritual usage and to divide the portion so as to insure an extra portion for Rudra. "This then is the reason why he (Rudra) is called Vāstavya, for a remainder (*vāstu*) is that part of the sacrifice which (is left) after the oblations have been made."²⁴ In effect, the myth connects Rudra doubly with the remainder. Not only does he remain at the sacrificial site (*vāstu*) after the other gods attain heaven, but also he is consigned the remainder (*vāstu*) of the sacrificial oblation.

The close mythic association between the sacrificial residue and Rudra is actualized in the Vedic rites. The daily Bali offering described in the Gobhila Gṛhya Sūtra (1.4), concludes with an offering to Rudra. The Rājasūya ceremony gives further illustration of Rudra's association with residues. At the conclusion of the Ratnin Offerings, the White Yajur Veda prescribes that a pap (*caru*) be prepared for the dual deity Soma-Rudra.²⁵ In

²¹ The text, its usage and significance, is in J. Gonda, "The Śatarudrīya", *Sanskrit and Indian Studies*; essays in honor of Daniel H.H. Ingalls, eds. M. Nagatomi, B.K. Matilal, J.M. Masson and E. Dimock, Dordrecht, Holland; Boston, U.S.A.; London, England; 1980, 75ff.

²² Gonda, "Śatarudrīya", p. 81.

²³ J. Eggeling, trans. *The Śatapatha-Brāhmaṇa in Sacred Books of the East* (SBE) XII. Reprint. Delhi, 1963, p. 200; cf. J. Deppert, *Rudras Geburt*, Wiesbaden, 1977, pp. 321-327.

²⁴ ŚB 1.7.3.7. Eggeling, *Śatapatha-Brāhmaṇa*, p. 201.

²⁵ The function of the dual deity is to protect the royal embryo until its safe birth. J.C. Heesterman, *The Ancient Royal Consecration*, The Hague, 1957, p. 57; see also p. 52.

the offering to the *devasū*-gods, performed on the eve of the unction ceremony which consecrates the king, a series of eight gods are presented with offerings.²⁶ The series always concludes with a *caru*-offering either to Rudra or to Varuṇa. Here as in the Ratnin Offering (and the Bali Offering) it is appropriate to honor Rudra with the last offering. This fact is probably related to the idea that the last of a series of offerings is "the bearer of the dangerous aspect of the powers involved in the series."²⁷ The ritual component immediately following the offerings to the *devasū*-gods contains another example linking Rudra to the ritual residue. The libation for use at the unction ceremony is poured into four unction cups. As for the remaining fluid, it is offered to Rudra in the āgnīdhṛīya-fire. A parallel ceremony occurs following the unction rite (*abhiṣeka*). The remaining portion of the unction fluid dripping down from the anointed king is proffered to Rudra in the āgnīdhṛīya-fire.²⁸ The ŚB (5.4.2.10), in commenting upon this episode, emphasizes the symbolism of the remaining portion, noting its redundant or extraneous nature and that it must be offered in the northern part of the āgnīdhṛīya for that is the region of Rudra. The explanation is important for it implies that the remainder "like the extra element in numerical systems it encompasses, expresses the whole and is at the same time the principle of continuity, the seed of a new production cycle."²⁹ That is, the remainder has a very special significance in the ancient Indian practice of extending the whole by one. The extra one both represents the composite whole, transcends it and thus assures the beginning of the new cycle.³⁰ Indeed the basic elements of the ceremony dealing with disposal of the remaining unction fluid clearly show that continuity of the royal line is their purpose. It is implicit that the remainder is a potent substance and desirable to the sacrificer for his well-being. It is the ritual substance having the power to provide for fertility, renewal and continuity of the royal line. It is the substance containing the essential and germinating power of the whole ritual sequence of which it is the extraneous element. As such, the remainder is both fearful and beneficial, dangerous and helpful. It is this extraordinary element which the Rājasūya-ceremonies consistently offer to Rudra.

The frequent connections between Rudra and the remainder are often cited to support an interpretation which views Rudra as isolated and removed from accepted Vedic ritual practices.³¹ Such interpretations assume that the residue is charged only with connotations reserved for the trivia, the impurity of leftover food, or the refuse of the liturgy. Certainly the prevailing attitude of the *smṛtis* is one of keen repulsion towards food remnants and ambiguity towards ritual remnants considered inferior to the original oblation.³² However, the significance of the remnant in the Rājasūya hints of other attitudes

²⁶ Heesterman, *Consecration*, pp. 69–78.

²⁷ Heesterman, *Consecration*, p. 70; fn. 5.

²⁸ Heesterman, *Consecration*, pp. 123–124.

²⁹ Heesterman, *Consecration*, p. 125.

³⁰ See J. Gonda, "Triads in Vedic Ritual," *Ohio Journal of Religious Studies* Vol. II, No. 2, 1974, 5–23.

³¹ E.g. Dandekar, "Rudra", 97; Gonda, *Visnuism and Śivaism*, p. 4; Hillebrandt, *Vedische Mythologie* II, 434ff.

³² This is well documented by C. Malamoud, "Observations sur la notion de 'reste' dans le Brāhmaṇisme," *Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde des Süds – Asiens und Archiv für Indische Philosophie* XVI, 1972, 5–26. Gonda opines that belief in the power inherent in the remnant may be compared to beliefs associated with agricultural

and values. In order to evaluate with accuracy Rudra's position in the Vedic rites, it will be important to see what range of concepts the *śrutis* associated with the ritual remainder, and this subject is taken up next.

There is considerable evidence from the Saṃhitās onwards that the concluding ritual portion is an element imbued with extraordinary power and therefore considered awesome and dangerous. The power of the sacrificial remainder is already set forth in a hymn of the Atharva Veda (AV 11.7), extolling the *ucchiṣṭa* (i.e. the remainder; literally "what is left [out]"). The hymn identifies the *ucchiṣṭa* as the primordial creative principle, the source of all materiality, the Vedas, the chants, all important *śrauta* rituals the Agnihotra, other sattras the sacrificial gift (*dakṣiṇā*) etc. In short, the *ucchiṣṭa* is the origin of all things, including the Vedic religious tradition. Whereas this exaltation of the remainder is unique to the AV, it does not represent an isolated belief in Indian speculative thought and ritualistic practice.

The studies of Gonda³³ and Malamoud³⁴ on the significance of the remainder in Brahmanism demonstrate that the ancients believed it was imbued with great potency and importance. Especially awesome are the leavings of the sacrificial food as these are considered the bearers of concentrated power leading to success, procreation and regeneration.³⁵ The extraordinary power the ancients attributed to the *ucchiṣṭa* is evident in a myth told in the TS 6.5.6. Aditi, desiring offspring cooked a brahman's mess for the Sādhyā gods. When she ate the remains, she became pregnant. The remainder's efficacy, plus the virtue of eating the sacrificial remainder as against eating first, or cooking for one's own enjoyment is being extolled.

The conviction seems to be that sacred power is concentrated in the remainder. As such, the remnant can be exceedingly dangerous and should be disposed of in a definite manner. The ritualists advise casting the remnant into the water or letting a priest eat it, but caution against throwing it into the fire.³⁶ This practice is prescribed for Rudra's offering in the Rājasūya ceremonies³⁷ and in the Agniṣṭoma.³⁸ The fact that the Tryambaka-offering to Rudra makes no use of a fire and that the administering *adhvaryu*-priest touches water at the close of the rite is in keeping with beliefs that Rudra's ritual share possesses a concentrated power.

The concentrated power in the residue is believed to assure the continuation between one successful sacrifice and the next. The remnant thus has the important ritual function of preserving the uninterrupted flow from ritual to ritual and eliminating any bad results

rituals. He writes, "The rituals are intended to ensure, *inter alia*, that the favorable relations between man and the power of the harvest will continue and that this power is regularly regenerated. The last ears are not reaped, the last few fruits are never taken from the tree, the chests in which the wheat is kept are never completely emptied for fear that this power is exhausted or the vivifying force may be lost"; J. Gonda, "Atharvaveda 11.7", *Mélanges d'Indianism à la mémoire de Louis Renou*, Paris, 1968, p. 313.

³³ Gonda, "Atharvaveda 11.7".

³⁴ Malamoud, "La notion de 'reste'".

³⁵ E.g. Gonda, "Atharvaveda 11.7", 313-315; 319-320; Malamoud, "La notion de 'reste'", 13-15.

³⁶ Gonda, "Atharvaveda 11.7", 314.

³⁷ Heesterman, *Consecration*, p. 70; fn. 5.

³⁸ See Dandekar, "Rudra", 97, fn. 8 where he cites as reference W. Caland and V. Henry, *L'Agniṣṭoma*, Paris, 1906, 210. Cf. TS 2.6.8.2 which indicates that Rudra's *idā* should not be offered in the fire.

which discontinuities would otherwise cause. There is no need to repeat here the interesting Vedic passages cited by Gonda which convincingly demonstrate the connective function of the remnant in the Full and New Moon rites, the Agnihotra, the śrāddha, the Soma sacrifice etc.³⁹ To these may be mentioned the Rājasūya-component (treated above at some length) dealing with disposal of the remaining unction fluid. In all these instances, emphasis is placed on achieving, by means of the remnant, an unbroken succession of liturgical action. The remnant allows for continuity since it is imbued with a concentration of sacred power.⁴⁰

This function of the remnant has capital importance for the central problem under consideration. As the ritual remainder is a consecrated remnant, being in effect the germinating seed of subsequent efficacious rites, the bearer of the ritual remnant must, accordingly, be the propagator and nurturer of the rite whose remnant he receives.

It is not possible to suppose that these notions were not in effect in those instances where Rudra is receiver of the remnant. The Vedic ritualists concerned with the Rājasūya were well aware of the connective function of the remnant and were also quite consistent in consigning it to Rudra. Thus concomitant with a clarification of the role of the remnant in the ritual, must also come a reappraisal of Rudra's position in the ritual. Of all the gods, he is most closely linked in myth and ritual to the remainder. He is the god *par excellence* known as *uccheṣaṇabhāga* ("he whose share is the remnant"; cf. TB 1.7.8.5). Far from signaling the god's estrangement from the Vedic ritual as has sometimes been assumed, it is here proposed that the epithet probably emphasizes Rudra's ability to sustain the continuation of the rites. His powers and personality are exceptionally suited for the task. Like the substance which is his share, Rudra is a deity both dangerous and beneficial. Further, being a god who, already in the Saṃhitās, has the capacity to create, Rudra's nature can accomplish the remainder's regenerative function.

These findings show that Rudra's character and main ritual functions are, from the beginning, in tune with representative aspects of Vedism. The big surprise is that the very characteristics which scholars have previously judged to be the non-Vedic elements in Rudra's make-up, turn out to be the very elements that knit him into the Vedic fabric. Rudra's ambivalent nature does not set him apart from other gods; instead it allies him with the most powerful and ancient stratum of the Vedic pantheon. His consumption of the ritual leftover does not divorce him from the sanctimony of the Vedic rites; instead it attests to his ability to guarantee their continuation.

Once a Vedic Rudra-Śiva is postulated, then it becomes reasonable to look for the emergence of *śaivite bhakti* from within the Vedic tradition. The Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad, with its pronounced *bhakti* tendencies, can represent that Vedic emergence and the Śatarudrīya litany can be its harbinger. Who else but a *bhakta* would wish to praise the hundred forms of Rudra? Progression towards *śaiva* theism from within Vedism heightens the probability of a coherent internal development going from Vedic Rudra-Śiva to the Hindu god Śiva. The probability that early *śaiva* art draws upon Vedic symbolism in

³⁹ Gonda, "Atharvaveda 11.7", 319-321.

⁴⁰ Gonda, "Atharvaveda 11.7", 319-321.

general, and symbolism associated with Rudra-Śiva in particular also increases. On that account, the Vedas and Vedāṅgas become indispensable tools in trying to understand the meaning and significance of early *śaiva* images. Application of these tools to gain insight into the three ways of depicting the Śiva Reality (Linga, Mukhalinga and Maheśa) and the concomitant usages of the multiplicity convention, are demonstrated in the *śaiva* chapters throughout both parts of this book. To set the stage for those discussions, a specific example is offered below. It is meant to illustrate the dimension of difference in the interpretation of a *śaiva* image when descriptions found in Vedic literature are taken into account:

Śiva Ardhanārīśvara images begin early in the Kuṣāṇa age yet the sources usually cited by art historians to explain the images almost always begin with the purāṇas.⁴¹ The difficulty in this approach is twofold. Not only is there a time discrepancy since later sources are used to explain an earlier form, but also by the time of the purāṇas, the form of Śiva Ardhanārīśvara has developed considerably beyond the two-armed representations seen in Kuṣāṇa art. I can only suppose that the reason the Vedas and Vedāṅgas have only occasionally been scanned for possible input is because the theoretical basis for using these sources had not been recognized. This having now been done, we can begin straightaway with the Saṃhitās and observe that an androgynous creator already appears in the Rig Veda. Viśvarūpa, the Asura Bull is a Cow-Bull; possibly this Bull who is also a Cow caused his own omniform condition by means of self-semination; the image of the androgynous Cosmic Male, Puruṣa, also begins in the Rig Veda.⁴² Furthermore, it continues in Vedic literature. The Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad (1.4) states that Ātman, in the form of Puruṣa, splits himself in half.⁴³ Half of Puruṣa is male, the other half is female. In this way he becomes a self-generating creator: the two halves copulate to produce all pairs of life. Since Rudra is identified with Puruṣa already in the Kauṣītaki and Śatapatha Brāhmaṇas,⁴⁴ the mythopoeic description in the Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad is a significant development towards an overall understanding of the advent of the *śaiva* Ardhanārīśvara concept and form. Equally noteworthy in this connection is that the Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad describes Rudra-Śiva in ways that could presume his hermaphroditic nature. ŚU 6.16, a verse containing accurate Sāṃkhya terminology, states that Rudra is the maker of all, the knower of all and self-caused (*ātmayonir*). God can be his own First Cause in several ways, one of which results from his being an hermaphrodite, that is, a self-seminating power. The Sāṃkhyan element in this verse describes the god as Lord (*pati*) of *pradhāna* and *kṣetrajāña* and ruler of qualities (*guṇa*). At this time, which is prior to classical Sāṃkhya, *pradhāna* and *kṣetrajāña* denote Material Nature and the Field-Knower respectively. The

⁴¹ E.g. N.P. Joshi, "Early Forms of Śiva" *Discourses on Śiva*, ed. by Michael W. Meister, Philadelphia, 1984, p. 57. Dipak Chandra Bhattacharyya, *Iconology of Composite Images*, Delhi, 1980, pp. 26-27. J.N. Banerjea (in *Development of Hindu Iconography*, 3rd ed. New Delhi, 1974) cites purāṇic mythology which he acknowledges came subsequent to the earliest representations in the Kuṣāṇa and Gupta periods; see p. 553.

⁴² See Chapter 2, pp. 25-26 for both the Asura Cow-Bull and Puruṣa.

⁴³ See Chapter 8, p. 84.

⁴⁴ See Chapter 7, pp. 76-78.

theistic outlook of the Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad posits Rudra-Śiva over both Material Nature and the Field-Knower, concepts that lead directly into Puruṣa-Prakṛti duality in classical Sāṃkhya.⁴⁵ Thus in ŚU 6.16, Rudra-Śiva rules two [proto-Sāṃkhyan] principles, which in the later classical Sāṃkhya come to be represented by the male (Puruṣa) and the female (Prakṛti). This same Upaniṣad when describing other creations arising from Rudra-Śiva, mentions that he is both “woman” and “man”, in the sense that these opposites originate from him. The first half of ŚU 4.3 states: You are a woman. You are a man. You are a youth and a maiden too.⁴⁶ The Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad also knows that opposing forces unite to constitute the ambivalent character of this god. The Upaniṣad quotes two verses from the Śatarudrīya litany which pray to the *śiva tanū* of Rudra and ask the god to refrain from showing his more injurious form to the worshippers (see ŚU 3.5–6).⁴⁷ I suspect that the evidence from both the Bṛhadāraṇyaka and the Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣads contains several clues to explain why the androgyne was incorporated into Śaivism. The half-male, half-female form reminds that Rudra-Śiva is creator of all phenomenal dichotomies (for which the shorthand reference is “the male” and “the female”); it also arrestingly captures the dominant bipolar trait of the *śaiva* supreme creator. These symbolic meanings could have already informed the earliest Śiva Ardhanārīśvara, appearing to the right of Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa on that veritable Brahmanic document in stone referred to earlier (see Pl. 1.3 and Chapter 1). This 1st century A.D. relief, carved in Mathurā, depicts the god as the union of opposites which, in the literature, both define his essential nature and attest to his creative energies. A Kuṣāṇa Caturmukha Liṅga, featuring one head of Ardhanārīśvara, prompts speculation that some of the proto-Sāṃkhya notions alluded to above were given plastic representation. The Ardhanārīśvara head appears on the Caturmukha Liṅga in the Russek Collection (see Pl. 19.3); the head faces West. Opposite to it, facing the East, is the Yogīn head. (The mukhas facing North and South are the Brahmācārīn and Aghora mukhas, respectively). It will be argued, in Chapter 19, that the full significance of specific mukhas appearing on a multiple Mukhalinga can best be attained when opposing pairs are interpreted together. If, then, the Ardhanārīśvara mukha is counterpoised with the Yogīn mukha, the resultant pair could allude to the means for attaining Rudra-Śiva and thereby salvation. The Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad (6.13) states that this goal is reached by means of *sāṃkhyayoga*, two doctrines which, for the author of this Upaniṣad, have not yet split into separate disciplines of Sāṃkhya and Yoga. The Yogīn mukha, on the Caturmukha Liṅga, could refer to Śiva, the Yogīn *par excellence* as well as the discipline of ascetism and meditation, Yoga; the Ardhanārīśvara mukha [symbolizing either Puruṣa-Prakṛti, or their antecedents, namely the duality Pradhāna-Kṣetrajña], could refer to Sāṃkhya. Together they could express the complementary means for reaching Rudra-Śiva in the early phase of Śaivism: When

⁴⁵ Cf. Michel Hulin, *Sāṃkhya Literature*, Wiesbaden, 1978, p. 131. Gerald J. Larson, *Classical Sāṃkhya*, 2nd rev. ed. Delhi 1979, pp. 114–115.

⁴⁶ The stanza is a repetition of AV 10.8.27 where it describes Skambha, the omniform Cosmic Pillar. Śiva does have some connection with a pillar etc. in that he is described as “Sthānu” (i.e. pillar, post etc.) in the Mahābhārata (e.g. 1.16a).

⁴⁷ ŚU 3.5–6 = VS 16.2–3 = TS 4.5.1.

one knows the God who is the cause of (everything) and who is to be reached through Sāṃkhya-Yoga, one is freed from all bonds".⁴⁸ These antecedents work their way into purāṇic contexts.

The Ardhanārīśvara image in the purāṇas is concerned with origins. The image reflects a monistic view on the origins of the world and its forms by attributing to the great god Śiva generative energies, symbolized as the complementary male and female sexual energies. In some purāṇic passages, creation occurs as a result of the sexual coupling of Śiva and Śakti; this reminds of the primordial, androgynous Puruṣa in the Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad whose halves copulate to effectuate creation, and, if the image of "self-sourced" Rudra-Śiva in the Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad is followed through, it ought to point toward the same manner of creativity. Other purāṇic passages describe creation as due to the cooperation of Puruṣa and Prakṛti, the two independent forces of the Sāṃkhya system. The Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa explains that the Ardhanārīśvara image expresses this view of creation; according to Adhyāya 55, an image of Ardhanārīśvara symbolizes the identity or sameness of the male Puruṣa and the female Prakṛti. The idea is that Śiva unifies within himself, and therefore transcends, the opposing-and-complimentary generative forces he encloses. The precursor for this symbolism can again be found in the Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad where Rudra-Śiva is viewed as lord of *pradhāna* and *kṣetrajña*. Ultimately, the preference for framing a creation image upon the fertilizing capacity of an androgyne must be seen as another example of the prevalence of the biological model in expressions of cosmic birth. As to why this particular example should attach itself to Hindu Śiva in the first place, here is where it may be well to call upon the theory of continuity between Vedic and Hindu elements of this god whose basic character trait throughout is a union of opposites.

⁴⁸ Translated by M. Biarreau, *Ahaṃkāra*, The Ego principle in the Upaniṣad (Contributions to Indian Sociology, 8, 1965).

CHAPTER SIX

FROM PURUṢA TO PRAJĀPATI

In a 1982 article, an early work in what was to become a series of studies by Jan Gonda on Vedic Prajāpati, he noticed that time and again Prajāpati brings into existence biological creation. Yet the process by which the god created eluded Gonda. He remarked "The . . . oft-repeated statement that 'Prajāpati created creatures' (*prajāpatiḥ prajā asṛjata*—e.g. TS 2.1.21, 2.4.4.1, 5.1.8.3, 6.6.5.1; PB 6.3.9, 7.10.15, 9.6.7, 10.2.1, 15.8.2, 16.5.23, 24.1.2, 24.11.2) leaves, in the cases mentioned, the reader in the dark about any detail as to how the process of creation had come to pass."¹ The present chapter is about that process, especially as it is described in the Brāhmaṇas, since in these texts it is an eloquent and influential construct pertaining to cosmic parturition.

The way Prajāpati gives rise to the world in the Brāhmaṇas is almost entirely based on the biological process. Several myths recount how Prajāpati created. Central to these is the theme of god as propagator of the world. For example, Prajāpati, according to one myth is the virile, lusty male who desires his own daughter. His seed however falls to the ground where it becomes the fecundating germ of the universe.² Another myth sees Prajāpati as the virile, fructifying stallion.³ Yet another, expounded in quite a number of Brāhmaṇas, views Prajāpati as the motherly Male, the *devatā*, that is, the divinity of birth. In this mythic image, the one on which we will concentrate, his structure, his actions, his feelings are all analogous to the human reproductive process; even his lassitude after creation, and his need for refertilization pertain to this model. In this exemplar of a birth-giving god, Prajāpati gathers to himself numerous biological motifs already associated with the Saṃhitās' various cosmic creators, particularly Puruṣa the omniform Cosmic Male from whose body the cosmos is emitted.

Here is an account from the Jaiminiya Brāhmaṇa (I.68, 69) illustrating the use of biological symbolism to explain the process by which Prajāpati creates the world:

Prajāpati indeed was in the beginning this [universe], for Prajāpati is the *devatā* of birth. He desired, "May I [become] many, may I propagate myself, may I attain manifoldness. From [his] head, [his] mouth he emitted the Trivṛt-stoma, the Gāyatrī-meter, the Rathantara-sāman, the deity Agni, the human Brāhman, the he-goat as animal . . . He desired 'May I propagate myself.' From [his] two arms, even [his] chest, he emitted the Pañcadaśa-stoma, the Trīṣṭubh-meter, the Bṛhat-sāman, the god Indra, the human Rājanya, the horse as animal . . . He desired, 'May I propagate myself.' From [his] belly (*udara*), even from the middle [of his body] he emitted the Saptadaśa-stoma, the Jagatī-meter,

¹ Jan Gonda, "The Popular Prajāpati," *History of Religion*, Vol. 22.2, 1982, 146.

² Cf. Stella Kramrisch, *The Presence of Śiva*, Princeton, 1981; Chapter I and Chapter III, pp. 51–54.

³ See discussion in E.W. Hopkins, "Gods and Saints of the Great Brāhmaṇa," *Connecticut Academy of Arts and Sciences, Transactions* 15, 1909, 23.

the Vāmadevya-sāman, the deity All-Gods, the human Vaiśya, the cattle as animal . . . Therefore, he [i.e. the Vaiśya] is procreative for Prajāpati emitted him from his birth-giving organ (*prajanana*). He desired, 'May I propagate myself.' From [his] two feet, even from [his] base, he emitted the Ekaviṃśa-stoma, the Anuṣṭubh-meter, the Yajñāyajñīya-sāman, no deity, the human Śūdra, the sheep as animal . . . By this emission, Prajāpati emitted creatures. He who knows this attains manifoldness through progeny and animals. Therefore, they praise this Agniṣṭoma sacrifice the chief, as it is Prajāpati's sacrifice."

The pull of Puruṣa is everywhere. The parallels between this passage and the Puruṣasūkta (RV 10.90) are numerous and fundamental. Just as Prajāpati is coextensive with the universe, so is Puruṣa all this universe, what was and what is to be (RV 10.90 2ab). The bodies of both cosmic deities are quartered into nearly identical parts in order to bring forth very similar items. However whereas the items are measured out of the passive Puruṣa in the Rig Veda, Prajāpati in the brāhmaṇas is the active generator of all he encloses. Comparable is that both Puruṣa and Prajāpati give rise to human beings, gods, Vedic meters and chants, horses, cattle, goats and sheep (RV 10.90.9–13). Nowhere does the mantle of Puruṣa fall more noticeably upon Prajāpati as in the sequence of limbs from which the social orders are born. Both creators emit the Brāhman from the mouth (see RV 10.90.12a; 13c). From the arms of both the Rājanya arises (RV 10.90.12b). The Vaiśya comes from the thighs of Puruṣa, but from Prajāpati's belly. This is the only deviation as the paradigm is reestablished for the Śūdra who issues from the feet of both Puruṣa and Prajāpati. The transference of the Puruṣa model unto the god Prajāpati is not confined to the Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa. Basically the same paradigm occurs in the Taittirīya Saṃhitā (VII.1.4–6);⁴ here, Prajāpati emits phenomenal forms from his quartered limbs in the context of the Agniṣṭoma sacrifice which he initiates (see VII.1.2–3). In the Pañcaviṃśa Brāhmaṇa (6.1.6), the same social orders, as well as stomas, chandas and gods are emitted by Prajāpati in the same paradigmatic fashion.⁵

Throughout the Brāhmaṇas, an identity between Puruṣa and Prajāpati is assumed and sustained. The names of the gods are used interchangeably. Notice how a Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa passage (ŚB VI.1.3) moves easily from one name to the other in the following creation account: "Prajāpati indeed was this [universe] in the beginning. Alone, indeed, he wished 'May I become, may I propagate myself.' He labored (*aśrāmyat*), he practiced austerity.⁶ From him, worn out and heated, the waters were emitted (*asrjyanta*); from that heated Puruṣa the waters were born." Another Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa passage (XI.1.6.1–2), describes creation differently but continues to interchange the names. "Verily in the beginning this universe was water, nothing but a sea of water. The waters desired 'How can we be propagated?' They labored, they practiced austerities; when they were becoming heated a golden egg was produced. The year indeed was not then in existence;

⁴ See the chart in H. Oertel, "Contributions from the Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa: Seventh Series," *Connecticut Academy of Arts and Sciences, Transactions* 15, 1909, 199.

⁵ This Brāhmaṇa introduces the emission of the seasons (spring, summer and the rainy season) as issuing from Prajāpati's first three organs. See W. Caland, trans. *Pañcaviṃśa Brāhmaṇa*, Calcutta, 1931, under VI.1.6–11; cf. Oertel's chart in *Transactions*, 199.

⁶ That is, he became heated.

this golden egg floated about for as long as the space of a year. In a year's time Puruṣa, this Prajāpati, was produced therefrom . . ."⁷ The same text (ŚB VI.1.1.1ff.), also relates a legend to explain how Puruṣa became Prajāpati. "In the beginning there was only the Non-Existent (Asat), that is, the Ṛṣis who were the vital breaths." The central breath, Indra, kindled activity into the others. Then they made seven separate persons (*puruṣa-s*) but decided to compress these into one Puruṣa so that he might generate (see VI.1.1.3). That same Puruṣa became Prajāpati (VI.1.1.5).

The knowledge that Puruṣa is Prajāpati operates in the Agnicayana ritual. The reason for placing a golden man into the first layer of the Āhavanīya-altar is because "he is Prajāpati, he is Agni, he is the Sacrificer. He is golden for gold is indeed light and fire is light; gold is immortality and fire is immortality. It is a man (*puruṣa*) for Prajāpati is Puruṣa." (Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa VII.4.1.15). Another Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa passage says it succinctly: "Truly that Puruṣa became Prajāpati. And that Puruṣa who became Prajāpati, he is this fire-altar which is being built (*agniscīyate*)."⁸

The consequences of this identification help to launch the Brāhmaṇas' remarkable image of the Pregnant Male who performs cosmic parturition. Puruṣa is Male; his name speaks that he is Maleness, *par excellence*. Yet the manner in which the universe is produced from Puruṣa is based on the uniquely female birth-giving process. There is no mistaking that the Male, Puruṣa, "gives birth" in the Puruṣasūkta. "From him (i.e. Cosmic Puruṣa), Virāj⁹ was born (*virāj*), from Virāj, Puruṣa (i.e. evolved Puruṣa)," so states RV 10.90.5. This verse makes clear that the Male gives birth by pushing something out from inside of himself. Since first to arise are Virāj/Puruṣa, the female and male principles, Cosmic Puruṣa must be an androgyne. The long citation from the Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa quoted above illustrates that Prajāpati assumes more than Puruṣa's paradigmatic schema for creating; he is also cast as a motherly Male. How else is one to explain that the god has a birth-giving organ, which ought to be the womb?

The Brāhmaṇas assign to Prajāpati a motherly anatomy consisting of breasts and a womb. The Pañcaviṃśa Brāhmaṇa mentions that Prajāpati generates a series of pṛṣṭha Sāmans from his womb (VII.8.8–13). Prajāpati's womb is also mentioned in another part of the Pañcaviṃśa Brāhmaṇa: "the yajñāyajñīya [sāmans] is a womb and out of this womb Prajāpati emitted the sacrifice" (VIII.6.3).¹⁰ The same Brāhmaṇa calls him an "inflated bag" of life, and Prajāpati sees "in himself the seed of creation" (Pañcaviṃśa Brāhmaṇa X.3.1–3).¹¹ In addition to the womb, Prajāpati's milky breasts are rather frequently referred to. The Pañcaviṃśa Brāhmaṇa (XIII.11.18) says that his two breasts are two sāman verses which can be milked to fulfill one's desires.¹² The Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa

⁷ The translation follows for the most part that of J. Eggeling in Sacred Books of the East (SBE), xlv; this is the text of the Mādhyandina School. Note that whereas here Prajāpati arises from *hiraṇmayamāṇḍa*, in AV 7.28 he is the Golden Germ (*hiranya garbha*) emitted by Skambha, the First Cause.

⁸ Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa VI.1.1.5; cf. ŚB XI.1.6.36 and ŚB VII.1.1.37.

⁹ Virāj can be both a male and a female principle; see J. Gonda, *Aspects of Early Viṣṇuism*, 2nd edition, Delhi, 1969, pp. 67–68.

¹⁰ Caland, *Pañcaviṃśa-Brāhmaṇa*.

¹¹ See Hopkins, "Gods and Saints," 24–25.

¹² Caland, *Pañcaviṃśa-Brāhmaṇa*: "The (sāman) with (the word) *ghṛtaścut* and the one with (the word)

(I.225), describes Prajāpati's two breasts as sāmāns milked by Indra to attain desires. The Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa provides a mythic explanation for the origin of Prajāpati's milk-laden breasts. According to the legend (II.5.1.3), Prajāpati gave himself breasts so that the creatures he created could suckle and live. Prior, his creatures had famished for want of mother's milk: "Prajāpati thought 'How is it that my emitted offspring perish?' He observed that his offspring perished for lack of food. He then made two breasts teeming with milk in the front of his own body.¹³ He (again) emitted offspring. These offspring, having been emitted and rushing to the breasts, thus came into existence; they are those that have not succumbed." This legend is an embellishment upon the belief that Prajāpati has feelings towards his creations. That belief already surfaced in a Taittirīya Saṃhitā passage which tells of the extraordinary love Prajāpati feels for his creations, a love sufficiently strong to motivate the creator to enter into his creations and, quite literally, to cause his undoing.¹⁴

It is easy to see that Prajāpati is structurally prepared for pregnancy, and it happens. Actually it already happens in the Saṃhitās; the Maitrāyaṇi (4.2.1) traces the cause of creation back to a pregnant Prajāpati. "Prajāpati was alone in the beginning. He desired to be many. He became pregnant. He was troubled by the foetus and became dark. His only life breath (*asu*) remained. From him Asuras . . . were born. He considered them as Pitṛs or elders. Thus he produced Pitṛs. He then became illumined by the creation of the Pitṛs. Then he created the Devas. While he was thinking of something, he created men. Thus gods, demons, manes, and human beings were created by him."¹⁵ The Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa describes Prajāpati's pregnancy in a mythopoeic narrative on the origin of things. The lengthy explanation (in VI.1.2.1–3) begins by describing Prajāpati's copulation with the Earth, Air, and Sky. Then his Mind copulated (*mithunāni samabhavaṭ*) with Vāk (fem. Sacred Speech) and he became impregnated with eight drops, created as the eight Vasus (see VI.1.2.6). Then his Mind copulated again with Vāk and he became pregnant with eleven drops, the eleven Rudras (7); the twelve Ādityas were the twelve drops that he became pregnant with (8) and similarly, he begat the Viśvadevas (see VI.1.2.9). So did Prajāpati beget. Then he ate the ripened fruit and became pregnant again. This time he created the gods from the upper *prāṇas* or vital breaths, and from the lower ones he created mortals (VI.1.2.11). Surely it is remarkable that Prajāpati is the one to become pregnant even though he copulates with the female goddess, Vāk. The only way to explain this situation is to place Prajāpati within a lineage of birth-giving Males, beginning with such ancient gods as Puruṣa, Tvaṣṭṛ, Viśvakarman and the Cosmic Bull.¹⁶ Incidentally, whereas Puruṣa is an androgynous birth-giving Male, Prajāpati is not, in

madhuścut as *nidhana* are the breasts of Prajāpati. Prajāpati is the sacrifice; by means of these two, he milks him. Whatever wish he has, he thereby milks."

¹³ This translation follows Caland (*Pañcaviṃśa-Brāhmaṇa*, under XIII.11.18). Caland was the first to recognize that the breasts belong to Prajāpati and not to the creatures he created, as both Eggeling and J. Gonda (*Vedic Literature*, Wiesbaden, 1975, p. 390) would have it.

¹⁴ See Chapter 4, p. 43.

¹⁵ J.R. Joshi, "Prajāpati in Vedic Mythology and Ritual," *Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, Annals* 53, 1972, 104–105.

¹⁶ See Chapter 2, pp. 24–26.

this part of the Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa story. Herein the sexes mate and it is the male who becomes pregnant!¹⁷

The urge to conceive and deliver is ascribed to Prajāpati, the Pregnant Male, in several of the texts. Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa XI.1.6.7 mentions that he laid in himself "the generative power" (*prajāti*), and elsewhere, the same Brāhmaṇa implies that he desires to have offspring.¹⁸ Prajāpati anticipates delivery with the words (in Pañcaviṃśa Brāhmaṇa VII.6.1): "Verily I have here conceived; now with Vāk let me bring forth."¹⁹ In this Brāhmaṇa, too, the female partner stands as a helper while the Pregnant Male expects to go through labour. As befits such a god, Prajāpati is vast; he is "as broad as he is high" (Pañcaviṃśa Brāhmaṇa 18.6.2).²⁰ He swells with an "extended middle, wherein lies his birth-giving organ," the womb.

Prajāpati's labour is mythically expressed as "the relaxation or emptying" of his middle, specified as his *yoni* or womb in Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa VIII.2.2.5: "When Prajāpati became relaxed all creatures went forth from the middle (*madhyate*) of him, that womb (*yoni*) of theirs. When that (i.e. middle part, or, *yoni*) of his body was restored, they entered it again." The relaxation of Prajāpati is a favorite theme.²¹ He feels "dry, milked out" and has to be revived with food. He must be nourished and gratified; in a word, his vigour must be restored.²² The reason for Prajāpati's fatigue reflects Vedic beliefs about the post partum condition. Pregnancy is equated with power as a Taittirīya Brāhmaṇa selection indicates. Reflecting on the proper *dakṣiṇā*, the selection states: "The sacrificer may give as *dakṣiṇā* as many cows as are bricks in the fire-altar. Or he may give a pregnant four year old cow. For such a cow is indeed all life powers"²³ (III.12.5). Conversely, in the post partum state, the energy is spent; where there was life there is now emptiness. That is why Prajāpati after creation, or cosmic parturition, "considered himself 'empty like a cow from whom milk is extracted.'"²⁴

There is only one way to revitalize Prajāpati. He must again become invigorated and capable of begetting the world anew. This is one of the aims of the Agnicayana ritual. Its purpose is to resubstantiate Prajāpati and render him fertile once more. On another level the ritual is meant to bring about a new or higher birth of the sacrificer who identifies himself with Prajāpati.²⁵ A passage in the Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa (VIII.2.2.5) makes

¹⁷ This phase of Prajāpati's creative activity follows upon an initial phase wherein he replicates the creative process of Puruṣa. In the opening stage of cosmic creation Puruṣa-Prajāpati produced Brahman (neut.), water and earth (including its plants and minerals) by means of self-generated powers produced through the ritual (see ŚB VI.1.1.8-15). Therefore, this phase indicates that Puruṣa-Prajāpati is a self-contained creator whose capacity for emitting creations must imply his androgynous condition.

¹⁸ Cf. ŚB II.1.2.6.

¹⁹ See Hopkins, "Gods and Saints," 25.

²⁰ See Hopkins, "Gods and Saints," 25.

²¹ See Hopkins, "Gods and Saints," 23 and fn. 4.

²² See Pañcaviṃśa-Brāhmaṇa XV.8.2; XVI.5.23.

²³ P.-E. Dumont, "The Special Kinds of Agnicayana (or Special Methods of Building the Fire-Altar) According to the Kathas in the Taittirīya-Brāhmaṇa: the Tenth, Eleventh and Twelfth Prapāṭhakas of the Third Kāṇḍa of the Taittirīya-Brāhmaṇa with Translation," *American Philosophical Society, Proceedings* 95, 1951, 668.

²⁴ Joshi, "Prajāpati," 108.

²⁵ Gonda, *Vedic Literature*, p. 389.

it abundantly clear that the way to restore and refertilize Prajāpati's body is to invigorate the womb and within it place the creatures that had been emitted. When Prajāpati relaxed, all forms left him. The *rūpas*, or phenomenal forms, must be reintroduced into Prajāpati in order to revitalize him. Prajāpati's condition when whole is multiform (i.e. *virūpa*;²⁶ see Pañcaviṃśa Brāhmaṇa XIV.9.8; X.6.7; XII.4.18). His epithet "All-Maker" (*viśvakarman* in Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa VII.1.1.43) recognizes that he is the begetter of all the universe. This is the condition that must be restored.

Exhausted Prajāpati can be restored by the ritual because there exists a symbiotic relationship between Prajāpati and the ritual. "Prajāpati is the sacrifice."²⁷ Therefore there is a direct correspondence between the ritual arena and the body of Prajāpati.²⁸ Incidentally, the sacrifice is also Puruṣa (Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa I.3.2.1 and Ṣaḍviṃśa Brāhmaṇa IV.1.4), and the fire-altar may be identified as Puruṣa (Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa X.4.1.6; Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa I.45) and Puruṣa-Prajāpati (Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa VI.1.1.5). Prajāpati himself declares that the sacrifice is his counterpart, or *pratimā*: "Prajāpati gave himself up to the gods and the sacrifice became theirs for indeed the sacrifice is the food of the gods. Having given himself up to the gods, he emitted the *pratimā* of himself which is the sacrifice"²⁹ (Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa XI.1.8.2, 3). Perhaps that is why the texts associate different rites, or parts thereof, with Prajāpati's body. "The Dvādaśāha is called the sacrifice of Prajāpati (Aitareya Brāhmaṇa IV.25). The stomas of Dvādaśāha are described as the powerful sons of Prajāpati (Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa III.302). Vājapeya is said to belong to Prajāpati (Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa II.192, 193). The Cāturmāsya sacrifices are identified with Prajāpati, the twenty-four-fold year. The Vaiśvadeva-parvan is his mouth; the New and Full Moon Sacrifices are his joints. The days and nights are his bone and marrow. The Varuṇāpraghāsas are his two arms. The three offerings in the Sākamedha are his expiration, inspiration and cross breathing. The Great Oblation (Mahāhaviryāga) is his body. The other offerings are deities within him. The Śunāsiriya-parvan is his foundation. Thus the Cāturmāsyaas are identical with Prajāpati (Kauṣītaki Brāhmaṇa VI.15; Gopatha Brāhmaṇa 1.26)."³⁰

The symbiosis operating in the Agnicayana is that the womb of Prajāpati is within the ritual's great altar. The Āhavanīya altar harbors the "womb" of Prajāpati. It must conform to certain measurements suited to Prajāpati's proportions (see Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa X.2.3.6, 7). Central to the building of the Āhavanīya altar is the belief that the womb of Prajāpati is revitalized with piling up the fire-altar in the ritual. In effect, the building of the fire-altar causes the reimpregnation of the god. Myth and ritual interlock through the performance of the Agnicayana. Interlocking is noticed in the Initiation, or Dīkṣā, of the sacrificer, who, it will be remembered is to identify himself with Prajāpati. In the Dīkṣā, the sacrificer is rendered "pregnant with all beings and all gods" by having carried the

²⁶ The reference is to the year which the brāhmaṇas often identify with Prajāpati.

²⁷ E.g. Taitt. Brāh. III.2.3; III.3.7; Go. Brāh. II.2.18; Śata. Brāh. I.2.5.12; See also G.U. Thite, *Sacrifice in the Brāhmaṇa Texts*, Poona, 1975, p. 259.

²⁸ Thite, *Sacrifice*, p. 8.

²⁹ This follows Eggeling's translation in *SBE* XLIV, p. 22.

³⁰ Thite, *Sacrifice*, p. 51.

Ukhyā Agni for a year (see Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa IX.5.1.62); such a one is ritually fit to carry out the sacrifice, having symbolically achieved the condition to be induced in Prajāpati (cf. ŚB IX.5.1.65).

To achieve this, there commences the piling up of the counterpart of Prajāpati's divine body, the seven-layered Āhavanīya altar.³¹ The reason why it is seven-layered and "constituted so as to measure seven man's lengths square"³² is because Puruṣa-Prajāpati-Agni (i.e. the fire-altar) is composed of seven persons (i.e. *puruṣa-s*; cf. Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa VI.1.1.5 *supra*). Details regarding the need to rebuild Prajāpati's cosmic body are disclosed in the opening portion of the Agnicayana which deals with cosmogony. Puruṣa-Prajāpati, having become consolidated, in the beginning (Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa VI.1.1.1–8), desired to reproduce and become many. Through the heat of austerity as the exertion of labour, Prajāpati toils to beget the cosmos. First Brahman (neut.) is emitted as the foundation. Next he released the waters from Vāk (VI.1.1.9). Wishing to be reproduced from the waters, he entered them, wherefrom an egg arose (10). From it, Brahman (neut.) arose (10). From the embryo inside arose Agni, the horse, the ass; the he-goat came from the adhering fluid; from the egg shell came the earth (11). And as Prajāpati's desire to generate continued, so did his toiling and begetting. It is at this juncture that he, with extraordinary haste and energy, couples, conceives and recouples with the offspring (see Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa VI.1.2ff., *supra*). At last, "Prajāpati having emitted the worlds was established on earth" (Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa VI.1.2.11). However, to expel earthly forms takes great energy. The vigour Prajāpati expanded in his cosmic parturition is likened to a courser's completion of a race: "Having emitted creatures, having run the whole race he fell apart" (Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa VI.1.2.12). At this point Prajāpati says to Agni "Restore me" (VI.1.2.13). The need to rebuild Puruṣa-Prajāpati-Agni climaxes the cosmogonic legend preceding the actual Agnicayana ritual.

Due to the multivalent interconnections between Prajāpati's body, the cosmos and the earthly fire-altar, the building of the latter results in the resubstantiation of the cosmic body of god. Every part of Prajāpati needs to be restored since every aspect of him fell apart during the cosmic exertion. His five bodily parts (*tanū-s*) became relaxed, that is, his hair, skin, flesh, bone and marrow had to be built up again as the five layers of the altar are piled up (cf. Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa VI.1.2.17). As the five *tanū* are the seasons (VI.1.2.18) which are the directions (the four quarters plus the upper region as fifth; ŚB VI.1.2.19), the worlds, time³³ and space are equally being restored as the bricks are piled.

After a series of preliminary actions and the Dīkṣā are performed, the actual building of the Āhavanīya commences.³⁴ The Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa, of the White Yajur Veda,

³¹ "Though Agni or the fire-altar is commonly called the five-layered one (*pañcacitika*) consisting as it does of five complete layers of bricks, on the top of these there is a small additional pile of two layers, the lower one (*punaściti*) in the form of the Gārhapatya hearth (VII.1.1.1 seq.) and the upper one, consisting of two bricks, on which the fire is ultimately laid down. Hence, Agni is also called "*saptacitika*." Eggeling *SBE* XLI, pp. 249–250; fn. 3.

³² Eggeling, *SBE* XLI, pp. 144–145; fn. 3.

³³ The Agnicayana recognizes that Prajāpati is the year; e.g. Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa VI.1.2.18, 19.

³⁴ For details on a modern recreation of the ritual, see Frits J. Staal, *Agni: The Vedic ritual of the fire altar*. 2 vols. Berkeley, 1982.

cites that 10,800 bricks are needed; all the recensions of the Black Yajur Veda cite 1,000 as the minimum number of bricks.³⁵ The symbolism of the piling up of the main altar reveals the need to restore Prajāpati's cosmic body and to render it fruitful again. A process of involution must now occur to prepare for a new evolution of wordly forms. What left his body must enter it again. That is why, when Prajāpati said "Restore me," and the gods said to Agni "We will heal our Father Prajāpati in you," Agni said, "I will enter him when whole". "Let it be so," they said. That is why being Prajāpati they call him Agni (Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa VI.1.2.21). The same Brāhmaṇa (VIII.7.4.19–21) explains how the seven layers reconstruct the body of Prajāpati-Agni. The first layer is the base (i.e. the legs) and the second layer is the part below the middle (i.e. below the waist) and above the legs; the third is the waist itself; the fourth layer is the part above the waist and below the neck; the fifth is the neck; the sixth is the head and the seventh layer is the vital airs. Immediately preceding this account is a description of the correspondence between each layer and an element of the cosmos. The purpose is to show that each element is restored into god's body with the piling of each layer. Thus, the first layer is the world filled with cattle; the second is the air filled with birds; the third is the sky filled with stars; the fourth layer is the sacrifice filled with *dakṣiṇā*; the fifth layer is the sacrificer filled with progeny; the sixth is the heavenly world filled with gods and the seventh layer is immortality the highest thing of all this (universe; see VIII.7.4.11–18).

The need to replace mankind, though not directly mentioned in the above itemizations, is taken up elsewhere in a most interesting passage concerned with the piling up of the second layer (i.e. the part below the waist and above the legs). In explaining why the Vaiśvadevī (or All-gods' bricks of the second layer) are laid down, this reason is given: "When Prajāpati had become relaxed all creatures went out from his middle, from that womb (*yoni*) of theirs. When that part of his body was reestablished, they entered him" (Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa VIII.2.2.5). The creatures who went out of his middle are the same Vaiśvadevī bricks and when these bricks are laid down into the second layer, the creatures that went out of the middle part of Prajāpati's body are caused to reenter him (see Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa VIII.2.2.6). The symbolism is clear: the womb chamber is the second layer and it is being impregnated with creatures in the guise of the Vaiśvadevī bricks. This ritual act, in effect, renders Prajāpati as Pregnant Male again. The act of reimplanting mankind, as it were, into the primordial womb is acknowledged in other passages dealing with the piling up of other layers "When Prajāpati became relaxed all living beings went from him in all directions. . . . Now that same Prajāpati . . . is now being built up; and those living beings which went from him are these bricks; hence, when he lays down these (bricks) he thereby puts back into him . . . those same living beings which went from him."³⁶ And again, ". . . when that (part) of his body had been restored, Prajāpati became pregnant with all beings: whilst they were in his womb, evil

³⁵ On the utilization of the actual number of bricks in connection with the possible origin of the ritual see Hyla S. Converse, "The Agnicayana rite: Indigenous origin?" *History of Religions*, Vol. 14.1, 1974, 81–95; C.G. Kashikar, "Agnicayana: Extension of Vedic Aryan Rituals," *Annals of the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute*, Vol. 62, pts. 1–4, 1981, 121–133.

³⁶ Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa VIII.3.3.9, 10; Eggeling, *SBE* XLIII, p. 54.

death, seized them.”³⁷ With the physical act of placing bricks of symbolic significance into layers also charged with symbolic significance, a metaphysical goal is achieved: bodily forms are again locked in the creator’s birth chamber. Thereby he has been transformed into the Pregnant Male. A new cycle of cosmic parturition may begin all over again.

Sacrificer, priests, spectators, who have witnessed the piling-up of the fire altar, should have also witnessed a passion play, as it were. The Agnicayana is a drama, and a spectacular one, at that. The sacrifice gives corporeality to the chief creative power in the Brāhmaṇas. Before witnessing eyes, the counterpart of Puruṣa-Prajāpati achieves dimensionality. Simultaneously, as the altar/cosmic body attains reality, the creation process involving divine multiplicity is acted out. Belief that cosmic creation can be caused by a multiformed, birth-giving Male who emits forms is an idea maintained throughout the Saṃhitās; moreover it is the rationale upon which is grounded the various definitions of the multiplicity convention found in the Saṃhitās. In the Agnicayana, that idea is acted out. Each time the Agnicayana is performed, there comes alive for numerous people the belief that cosmic creation is the intensification of human parturition. Besides, ritual action validates that all earthly forms, or *rūpas*, are born from the womb of a masculine creator, that this creator’s intrinsic nature is omniform, and, that a new world cycle can be achieved if and when this creator is rendered parturient – and omniform – again. For the duration of the sacrifice, and who would know for how much longer, participants and spectators alike would pay allegiance to the notion that the stars in the heavens, the birds in the sky, the animals on the ground, they themselves and their progeny as well as the gods, the worlds and immortality originate from the self-same source, the cosmic body of Puruṣa-Prajāpati, reconstituted in the sacrificial arena to assure future regeneration.

The role of the sacrifice as a regenerative force is not limited to the Agnicayana.³⁸ Indeed the Brāhmaṇas testify to the belief that the Vedic sacrifice in general is considered an extremely powerful instrument whereby fertility in nature and in beings may be promoted. A few examples, from the large number available, can be cited. They show that a major reason for initiating a Vedic sacrifice is to attain progeny. The purpose of the aforementioned Dīkṣā in the Agnicayana is to generate a new divine body for the sacrificer.³⁹ So too do the Pravargya and Mahāvratā rites have generative significance.⁴⁰ The prevailing attitude, to quote an explanation accompanying a Daśapūrṇamāsa offering is that “from the sacrifice offspring are assuredly produced” (Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa I.9.2.5).⁴¹

In addition to stimulating generation, the sacrifice itself IS the generative process (e.g.

³⁷ The passage, Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa VIII.4.2.1, occurs in connection with the piling of the 4th layer and introduces a myth on the removal of evil and death from beings in the womb of Prajāpati. Eggeling, *SBE*, p. 67.

³⁸ On this topic see the informed discussion in Thite, *Sacrifice*, pp. 244–260.

³⁹ For details on the generative and thanatotic aspects of Dīkṣā, see Sylvain Levi, *La Doctrine du Sacrifice*, 2nd ed. Paris, 1966, pp. 102–103; Thite, *Sacrifice*, pp. 118–119.

⁴⁰ See J.A.B. van Buitenen, *The Pravargya*, Poona, 1968, p. 37, Thite, *Sacrifice*, pp. 100–105; 125–132; esp. 131–132.

⁴¹ Thite, *Sacrifice*, p. 244. The grhya rites are, of course, also imbued with fecundating power; cf. the Pūṃsavana rite.

Aitareya Brāhmaṇa I.3).⁴² For generation to occur a pair or union (*maithuna*) is needed and this exigency accounts for a great deal of sexual symbolism in the explanations that the Brāhmaṇas supply. To illustrate, in the New and Full Moon Sacrifice, the dripping spoon is male, the offering spoon is female (Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa I.3.1.9; I.4.4.3–4). Or, the sacrifice is produced from the union of the upper kindling stick which is the male Purūravas with the lower stick which is the female Urvaśī (Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa III.4.1.22). In the Pravargya as set forth in the Aitareya Brāhmaṇa, “the cauldron is a divine pairing; the cauldron is the member, the two handles the testicles, the spoon the thigh bones, the milk the seed.”⁴³ “The Vedi (altar) is feminine, Agni (the fire) is masculine. The female lies embracing the male. Thereby a *maithuna* (productive pair) is made” (Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa I.2.5.15; cf. ŚB I.9.2.21). The fire-altar in the Agnicayana also consists of pairs (ŚB X.1.1.9).

The Brāhmaṇas often establish a pair on the basis of the grammatical gender of nouns. Using some of the above illustrations as examples, *vedi* is a feminine noun, *agni* is masculine; *scruc* the offering spoon is feminine, *sruva* the dripping spoon is masculine. A marvelous story has the cunning Devas outwit the Asuras because the latter lost out on being able to match “gender pairs.”⁴⁴ The Devas and the Asuras agree to proclaim as loser that side unable to cite “the pair” for a word given by the opposing side. Then Indra, on the side of the Devas said “one” (*eka* masc.), to which the Asuras gave *ekā*, the feminine. This made a pair. Then the numbers two, three and four were cited by the Devas, and the Asuras gave the corresponding gender of the number to form a pair. But when the Devas said “five,” the Asuras could not counter with the pairing word since “five” and all subsequent numbers drop gender. The Devas won. This story also suggests the special property attributed to the numbers “one” through “four.” Such numbers can “pair” and that feature may account for the fact that these numbers come to symbolize “union” and by extension “human parturition.” “Up to four there are pairings, union, propagation” states Kauṣītaki Brāhmaṇa VII.10.

This statement and the preceding story introduce us to the phenomenon that numbers in the Vedas may convey symbolic properties, in addition to, or in lieu of, their arithmetic values. Since this property will have direct bearing on the significance of numbers used in the multiplicity convention, it should be considered in some detail especially with numbers occurring both in the above religious developments and in subsequent iconography.

Symbolic numbers are associated with Puruṣa-Prajāpati as well as the enactment of the cosmogonic theme in the Agnicayana. In an interesting passage in the Taittirīya Saṃhitā dealing with the piling of the fire-altar (V.6.4.2–3), the four directions are associated with the four sides of Prajāpati to the effect that the four sides of the god bespeak of his omnipresence and omniscience. “Four,” in this instance, is charged with the meaning

⁴² A.B. Keith, *Rigveda Brāhmaṇas: The Aitareya and Kauṣītaki Brāhmaṇas of the Rigveda*, Cambridge, 1920; Vol. 25 in the Harvard Oriental Series; pp. 108–109.

⁴³ Keith, *Rigveda Brāhmaṇas*, p. 124.

⁴⁴ See Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa II.291; Pañcaviṃśa Brāhmaṇa XXI.13.2; Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa I.5.4.6–11.

“completeness” in the world on the horizontal plane. This symbolic meaning is derived from the association of “four” with the four directions of the world; when taken together the four directions represent “total space on earth.” That is why the four faces of Agni express the fire’s completely filling the surrounding space as well as the deity’s all-seeing, and therefore all-knowing, capabilities. Agni’s omnipresence stems from being *viśvatomukha*, “facing in every direction” (Rig Veda 1.97.6a = Atharva Veda Śaunakan IV.33.6a; see Chapter 2). These cases together with the ones cited above, indicate that the number “four” can have several different symbolic properties; to wit, “four” can symbolize “all” etc. and “union, propagation” etc.

“Four” can be used in still another symbolic way and it is illustrated in the *Puruṣasūkta*. “Four” is seen as a number which completes a triad. In this context, “four” applies to vertical space. The notion that vertical space is tripartite is axiomatic from the earliest Vedic hymns onward. The idea that the tertiary division into earth, atmosphere and heavens could be completed by a tetrad had also been recognized from the time of the Rig Veda. It is on account of the complex nature of the third space, the heavenly regions, that the triad could admit of an addition to complete the vertical expanse of space. Already in the Rig Veda, the heavenly regions consist of the sky, visible in the phenomenal world, and a “highest sky” imperceivable to the world below. This world view continues in the *Samhitās* and the *Brāhmaṇas*. A passage in the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* describes this cosmology and recognizes the basic triad division, calling it “the three worlds;” a fourth space completes the cosmic schema and redefines it as a tetrad: “He [i.e. the sacrificer] takes it [i.e. the imperfectly pressed Soma-plants] with a quadrangular vessel. Three indeed are these worlds. He obtains these three worlds by three (corners of the vessel). Prajāpati is the fourth, surpassing these worlds. Thus he obtains Prajāpati even with the fourth (corner). Therefore, he takes it with a “quadrangular vessel” (IV.6.1.4). The fourth world designates the region of the divine, just as the highest heaven is the realm of the numen in the Rig Veda. Clearly the passage intends to explain how the drawing of soma with a square vessel puts the sacrificer in touch with Prajāpati. The explanation hinges on the assumption that total vertical space is the combination of the “three” plus “one” formula, where “one” completes the triad and becomes the fourth space.

The number “four” which completes a vertical triad may be a superior fourth or a subordinate fourth. In the preceding passage from the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*, the region of Prajāpati is an example of the superior (or, transcendental) fourth. The *Puruṣasūkta* also contains an example of a diminutive or subordinate fourth which completes a triad. Here the triad constitutes the threefold, unmanifest *Puruṣa* in the transcendental region; the lower “fourth” is that part of *Puruṣa* from which the universe is born. There is another subordinate fourth operating in the *Puruṣasūkta*; the upper three classes, it will be remembered, originate from a superior triad composed of *Puruṣa*’s mouth, arms and thighs. But the fourth class is born from the feet of *Puruṣa*, the subordinate fourth in the schema.⁴⁵ This tetrad, composed of a triad plus a subordinate fourth is of course also

⁴⁵ Cf. P. Mus, “Du Nouveau sur Rgveda 10.90? Sociologie D’une Grammaire,” in *Indological Studies in honor of W. Norman Brown*, Vol. 47 in the *American Oriental Series*, New Haven, 1962, pp. 165–185.

recognizable in the Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa passage casting Prajāpati into much the same paradigmatic schema.⁴⁶ A superior fourth and a subordinate fourth can complete an entity by means of the “three plus one formula” because of an underlying formula applicable to symbolic numbers.

There is a remarkable practice in ancient Indian religious thought which expresses “totality, completeness, surpassing greatness” by the addition of “one” (i.e. the whole) to the number of the entity’s parts. The practice, probably first recognized by Abel Bergaigne,⁴⁷ has been most recently reaffirmed by the researches of Gonda and Knipe.⁴⁸ The practice implies “that a number exceeding a given quantity by one summed up and moulded into one complex the entities constituting that quantity.”⁴⁹ It is thus a way of conveying, numerically, the all-pervasiveness of something. Bergaigne called it an aspect of “l’arithmétique mythologique;” Knipe refers to the practice as the “x plus one” imagery.⁵⁰ Once recognized, this method of forming a new number, symbolizing the totality of the entity, can be seen to occur very frequently, especially in the Brāhmaṇa texts. To convey the concept “all food,” the Pañcaviṃśa Brāhmaṇa (4.10.5) states that “food” is the twenty-fifth. The reason for this is because in a year all food ripens. A year is twenty-four fold.⁵¹ Therefore, the parts (or segmentations) of the entity plus the entity itself (i.e. food) equals the concept “all food.” The “total body” can be said to be twenty-five fold (Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa IX.1.1.44). There are twenty-four limbs or parts plus the addition of the whole (i.e. the body itself) make for the twenty-five fold body.

Prajāpati, the Lord of all creatures, is frequently associated with numbers arrived at by the “x plus one” practice. The number sixteen is emblematic of “completeness;” thus the gods are sixteenfold. To emphasize the all-inclusive nature of Prajāpati, he is characterized as seventeenfold (e.g. Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa I.5.2.17; Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa I.6.2.8).⁵² Seventeen enters into ritual procedures and ritual measurements being associated with Prajāpati’s nature, Totality itself.⁵³ Similarly, Prajāpati can be associated with the number thirty-four (e.g. Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa V.1.2.13; V.3.4.23; Pañcaviṃśa Brāhmaṇa XVII.11.3; Taittirīya Brāhmaṇa I.8.7.1). There are thirty-three gods and Prajāpati is the thirty-fourth. As such, not only does he exceed the others but he also encompasses and surpasses them. “Thirty-four” is a number used here less for its arithmetic value and more for it emphasis on the divine totality of Prajāpati’s nature. Or, Prajāpati can be the fourteenth one in his capacity as the total year when the intercalary month is counted as the thirteenth month.⁵⁴ All these numerical expressions affirm that Prajāpati surpasses all parts, being

⁴⁶ Other Vedic examples of the subordinate fourth completing the principle triad are found in Knipe, *Heat*, p. 12.

⁴⁷ See his *La Religion Védique* II, Paris, 1883, 114–156.

⁴⁸ J. Gonda, *Triads in the Veda* in *Verhandelingen der Koninklijke Nederlandse Akademie van Wetenschappen, Afd. Letterkunde*, N.S. Deel 91, Amsterdam, Oxford, New York, 1976, pp. 8ff.; Knipe, *Heat*, pp. 7ff.

⁴⁹ Gonda, *Triads*, p. 8.

⁵⁰ Knipe, *Heat*, p. 7; Bergaigne, *Rel. Védique* II, 114ff.

⁵¹ Counting the year’s twenty-four half-months; cf. Pañc. Brāh. XII.4.18 and Caland’s comment in fn. 1.

⁵² On this and other numbers associated with Prajāpati, see J. Gonda, “Prajāpati’s Numbers,” in G. Gnoli et L. Lanciotti eds. *Orientalia Iosephi Tucci Memoriae Dicata*, Vol. II, Rome, 1987; 539–560.

⁵³ Cf. Lévi, *La Doctrine*, p. 16; Thite, *Sacrifice*, p. 272.

⁵⁴ Thite, *Sacrifice*, p. 272.

the archetype together with its parts. Prajāpati, embodying all types and their components and therefore possessed of all forms can, of course, be associated with comparable non-numerical expressions such as *virūpa* and *viśvakarman*, as noted above.⁵⁵

The Agnicayana employs the number "five" whose symbolic properties are based upon the "x plus one" formula. "Five" in this ritual, and in the Brāhmaṇas in general, can be charged with spacial totality, that is, the totality of the visible plus invisible spheres together with the communicatory path that connects them. Already the Rig Veda mentions five cardinal points (IX.86.29), emphasizing thereby that a strong cynosure of the quadrants exists which is imbued with the special attribute of communication.⁵⁶ The Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa cites five regions (IX.2.3.26) in ascending progression: the earth, atmosphere, sky, back of the firmament and heavenly world (*svarga-loka*); the identical progression occurs in Atharva Veda 4.14.3 where the fifth region is one of celestial light. This passage from the Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa occurs at the completion of the Āhavanīya altar in the Agnicayana, and allies the upward physical progression to the sacrificer's advancement from the Gārhapatya to the Agnīdhriya to the Āhavanīya fire. The sacrificer's intent is to ascend to the heavenly world by means of the fire altar (cf. Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa IX.2.3.24). This intention is achieved by the symbolic correspondence between the five layers of the Āhavanīya fire-altar and the fivefold nature of the universe. Attainment of the heavenly world and "mingling with the gods" being central to the sacrificer's ritual aims stimulates the frequent mention of the fivefold nature of the great altar.⁵⁷ As the five layers of the great fire-altar also correspond to the five *tanū* of Prajāpati, the multivalency of "five" in the Agnicayana promotes liturgical and cosmological equivalencies which assure success on the several levels. The entire eighth Kāṇḍa of the Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa does not lose sight of these esoteric correspondences; herein the physical and metaphysical equivalencies operating in each of the five layers is revealed. In addition, man (*puruṣa*) is also fivefold, consisting of hair, skin, flesh, bones and marrow, just as Prajāpati (see Aitareya Brāhmaṇa II.14; Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa I.198; Gopatha Brāhmaṇa II.6.8. omits "flesh" and inserts "head", *mastiṣka*). As a result, in piling the five layers, the sacrificer transforms his human body into a divine one. "Five" which is symbolic of the center within and above the quadrants is to be recognized here as the quintessential number.

Two diminutive courses are built over the fifth layer of the Āhavanīya, bringing the final total to seven (see Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa IX.1.1.26). This layering invites speculation that the completed altar could be considered a "five plus two" unit, which could influence its symbolic significance. But the additional layers do not relate in shape or number of

⁵⁵ Prajāpati is also said to have twelve bodies (*tanū* Ait. Brāh. V.25). Other deities in the Brāhmaṇas that are associated with multiple bodily parts are: Soma (Śata. Brāh. IV.5.2.12); Tvaṣṭṛ (ŚB II.2.3.4; cf. ŚB III.8.3.37; Taitt. Brāh. III.5.12; III.6.2; II.6.7, 14); Indra (cf. Taitt. Brāh. II.6.4); Viśvarūpa, Tvaṣṭṛ's son (Pañc. Brāh. XVII.5.1; ŚB I.2.3.2; I.6.3.1ff.; V.5.4.2; Jaim. Brāh. II.153-157); Agni (ŚB VI.5.1.3; Kauṣ. Brāh. I.1; as Narāśaṃsa, Brāh. III.6.13); Varuṇa (Taitt. Brāh. III.9.15); Svāha (Ṣaḍ. Brāh. IV.7.2); Gandharvan (Jaim. Brāh. I.125).

⁵⁶ Cf. Knipe, *Heat*, p. 10. For other examples of "four plus one" from the Rig Veda see Bergaigne, *Rel. Védique* II, 125-127. "Five" writes Kramrisch, "is the quintessential number of the center and above" (Śiva, p. 256).

⁵⁷ E.g. Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa IV.2.5.4; Pañcaviṃśa Brāhmaṇa VI.7.12; cf. Thite, *Sacrifice*, p. 267.

bricks to the preceding five. It therefore may not be appropriate to consider the seven-layered altar as relating to a "five plus two" numerical symbolism. The Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa itself seems to indicate that the seven-layered altar was considered a unit associated with the numbers "four plus three." The text has this to say regarding the composition of the fire altar: "He [i.e. Puruṣa-Prajāpati] is composed of seven persons for this Person (Agni)⁵⁸ is composed of seven persons,⁵⁹ to wit, the body (trunk) of four, and the wings and tail of three" [see Pl. 14.20]; "for the body of that (first) Person (was composed of) four, and the wings and tail of three. And inasmuch as he makes the body larger by one person, by that force the body raises the wings and tail."⁶⁰ This division implies that the Āhavanīya may be imbued with symbolic values derived from the numbers "four" and "three." If "four" connotes special completeness on the horizontal plane and "three" is connected with the three worlds, the three ascending regions, then "four plus three" may symbolize the totality of worldly space, a fitting symbol of the great fire-altar. This significance is itself suggested elsewhere in the Agnicayana portion of the Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa (see VI.5.2.22), where it is said that as large as the (three) worlds and the four quarters, so large is this whole (universe). There is some indication that other numerical divisions (and therefore other symbolic values) may also be evident in the Āhavanīya. The top or seventh layer of the Āhavanīya seems to pertain to the most amorphous substance of Prajāpati (i.e. his vital airs, *supra*) and the highest/transcendental element in the cosmos (i.e. immortality *supra*); it is therefore a layer quite distinct from the other six layers. This suggests that a "six plus one" symbolism may be equally operative. Bergaigne's researches show that the combination of "six plus one" in the number "seven" may result from the "x plus one" formula. He observed a Rig Vedic equation for "seven" which comprises three heavens plus the three earths plus one; the "one" represents an invisible sphere (e.g. RV 1.164.15).⁶¹ This equation with its transcendental "one" fits quite nicely with the top, or seventh layer of the altar. Bergaigne also noted that the number "seven" showed considerable independence and may be used symbolically without being further broken down. This is the way the number is usually used in the Rig Veda, he observed. He cites many Rig Vedic examples, including "seven seers," "seven sisters" which are equal to the "seven prayers";⁶² there are AV references to the "seven tongues" of Agni, as well as other Vedic references to Agni's "seven wives, mothers or sisters," Agni's "seven rays" or flames.⁶³ All these examples portray "seven" as a prime number having strong sacerdotal value. The sacerdotal significance inhering in the number "seven" may also help explain why the Āhavanīya altar is seven-layered. Incidentally, the strong field of attraction between "seven" and "the sacrifice" can be illustrated by other, perhaps better known examples. Central to the Vedic marriage rites are the seven steps (the *Saptapadī*) taken

⁵⁸ I.e. the fire-altar.

⁵⁹ See above, p. 117.

⁶⁰ Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa VI.1.1.6; Eggeling, *SBE* XLI, pp. 144-145.

⁶¹ See Bergaigne, *Rel. Védique* II, 143-144.

⁶² *Rel. Védique* II, 144-145.

⁶³ See D.M. Srinivasan, "The Religious Significance of Divine Multiple Bodily Parts in the Atharva Veda," *Numen* Vol. XXV.3, 1979, p. 204; A.B. Keith, "Numbers," *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics* IX, 1917, 407.

around the sacred fire by the bridegroom and the bride. Seven steps again figure as the first action undertaken by the babe, Siddhārtha Gautama (the future Buddha), after being born. Just as a marriage becomes complete and irrevocable on the completion of the *Saptapadī*,⁶⁴ so too in Siddhārtha's case they confirm the completion of his earthly mission as surely as does his given name (Siddhārtha i.e. "he who has accomplished his goal)."

I must register the possibility that the number of bricks to be used in the Agnicayana may also have symbolic value; whether this value predominates over the arithmetic one is difficult to gauge. The fact that the two recensions of the Yajur Veda cite a vastly different number of bricks needed in this ritual should give some pause that more than arithmetic numbers could be involved. The two sets of numbers (a minimum of a 1,000 bricks in the recensions of the Black Yajur Veda versus 10,800 bricks in the White Yajur Veda) could possibly record numbers having similar symbolic meanings. "A thousand" expresses the idea of "total number, completeness etc." in the Vedic tradition, beginning with the Rig Veda.⁶⁵ The Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa maintains that "a thousand is everything" (e.g. IV.6.1.15; VIII.7.4.9) and this continues in the sūtra literature.⁶⁶ 1,000 is certainly a number associated with Puruṣa. Also, one of Prajāpati's numbers is 1,000; in the Taittirīya Saṃhitā 7.1, 5.3, for example, Prajāpati causes, at the request of the gods, a sacrifice to be made with a thousand.⁶⁷ "One hundred and eight" also seems to be a number frequently occurring in the sacrifice where it is associated with auspiciousness. "...for 108 pieces of *udumbara* wood ŚG. 5.10.2; 108 *darvīhomas* BGŚ. 1.7, 1; 108 oblations 2,4,4; 5,8,1 one should mutter "Death must go away" 108 times (a *śānti* ritual);"⁶⁸ To these can be added an example from the current injunction for Smārta Maharashtian Brahmans following the Śākala school of the Rig Veda to recite the Saṃdhyā morning *japa* ten, twenty-eight or one hundred eight times.⁶⁹ One hundred and eight when multiplied by 100 results in the number of bricks cited by the White Yajur Veda. Possibly the idea is to raise to the highest number, or degree, the significance inhering in 108.⁷⁰ In the end, it is just possible that whether the ritual uses 1,000 or 10,800 bricks, the symbolic value imparted by the bricks using both sets of numbers may not be far apart; both may signify that the Agnicayana represents completeness and totality; that is, it represents everything in the cosmos.

This overview on the symbolic value of a set of numbers occurring with Puruṣa-Prajāpati and the Agnicayana concludes with a deceptively simple observation. The numbers "one thousand," "seven," "five" and "four" may all express the notion of "completeness and

⁶⁴ See Ram Gopal, *India of Vedic Kalpasūtras*, Delhi, 1959, p. 237.

⁶⁵ See Chapter 2, p. 26.

⁶⁶ See Jan Gonda, *Vedic Ritual, The Non-Solemn Rites*, Leiden-Koln, 1980, p. 41.

⁶⁷ Gonda, "Prajāpati's Numbers," 20.

⁶⁸ Gonda, *Vedic Ritual*, p. 39.

⁶⁹ D.M. Srinivasan, "Saṃdhyā: Myth and Ritual," *Indo-Iranian Journal* Vol. XV.3, 1973; 177.

⁷⁰ On this conceptual usage of 100 and 1,000, see Gonda, *Vedic Ritual*, p. 41. J. Gonda (*Prajāpati and the Year*, Verhandelingen der Koninklijke Nederlandse Akademie van Wetenschappen, Afd. Letterkunde, Nieuwe Reeks, Deel 123, Amsterdam, Oxford, New York, 1984, p. 72) opines that the number of bricks, 10,800, represents the number of hours in the year. The number one thousand may also be brought into connection with the year. Both the year and a thousand are homologized to *sarvam* – all, totality, everything (see Gonda, *Prajāpati and the Year*, pp. 62–63; 82).

totality.” However, the truly impressive feature of Vedic numerical symbolism is that each of the above numbers expresses a distinct type of “all.” Their distinctive symbolic meanings are summarized below:

- 4 = four quarters of the world; spacial totality on the horizontal plane
- 5 (4 + 1) = the quintessential number referring to a spacial totality which includes the visible (i.e. four quarters and their center) and invisible (four quarters and a superior fifth) planes and the communicatory passageway between them
- 7 = ritual completeness/sacrificial perfection
- 4 + 3 = four quarters plus the three regions being the totality of worldly space
- 1,000 = totality of numbers of things; completeness prior to the introduction of distinctions.

CHAPTER SEVEN

RUDRA AND VIṢṆU ARE LINKED TO PURUṢA-PRAJĀPATI

A. Rudra is Born in the Image of Puruṣa

The Kauṣītaki Brāhmaṇa contains a legend (VI.1–9) about the birth of Rudra which reveals him to be none other than the quintessence of Puruṣa. Prajāpati, desirous of progeny does penance (*tapas*); he becomes heated and creates five offspring. They are Agni, Vāyu, Āditya, Candramas and Uṣas. Uṣas effected the form of an Apsaras in front of them. They poured out their seed and they told this to Prajāpati. Prajāpati then made a golden vessel (*hiraṇmayam camasam*), the length of an arrow in height as in breadth. In it he poured the seed and in that place arose the one having a thousand eyes, a thousand feet, with a thousand fitted arrows.¹ He caught his father, Prajāpati, and demanded to be named. Prajāpati conferred upon him eight names; each one was bestowed under duress of the offspring. He was given the names Bhava, allied with waters (cf. VI.2), Śarva, allied with fire (cf. VI.3), Paśupati, allied with Vāyu, the wind (cf. VI.4), Ugra, allied with plants and trees (cf. VI.5), the great god (Mahādeva), allied with the sun (cf. VI.6), Rudra allied with the moon (cf. VI.7), Īśāna, allied with food (cf. VI.8), and lastly, Aśani (thunderbolt), allied with Indra (cf. VI.9). This is the great god (*mahādeva*) of eight names and divided into eight parts (*aṣṭanāmāṣṭadhāvihita*).

Mahādeva, born in the likeness of Puruṣa, has Prajāpati as father. Moreover his birth affirms that the father is the Pregnant Male even though the son of sons does not arise from the cavity within the father. He originates from the external equivalent of the womb, namely the father's golden vessel.² "Gold is immortality", the Brāhmaṇas are fond of saying,³ and a "golden vessel" approximates the notion of a "womb of immortality". It is made by Prajāpati so as to receive and nurture the seed which develops into Mahādeva. Although the womb vessel is external to the body of the father and the seed is from the father's first set of male offspring, it is Prajāpati who collects and saves the seed, and thereby "fathers" the offspring.

Prior to receiving names, that is prior to the differentiation of his essence into various forms, the great god is on par with Puruṣa.⁴ Before receiving his eight names, he is like the Cosmic Giant, having a thousand eyes and a thousand feet. Probably these two references to limitless eyes and feet are meant to convey the idea that like Puruṣa, the

¹ *sa prajāpatirhiraṇmayam camasamakarodīṣumātramūrdhwamevam tīryañcam tasminetaḥ samasiñcattata udatiṣṭhatsahasrākṣaḥ sahasrapātsahasreṇa pratihitābhiḥ.*

² For a discussion on the vessel as the symbolic place of birth in religion and art, see Chapter 15, especially sections on the *kumbhodara yakṣa*.

³ E.g. Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa VI.7.1.2.

⁴ He is Puruṣa for Stella Kramrisch, *The Presence of Śiva*, Princeton 1981, pp. 100–104.

undifferentiated nature of the great god is omniform, or *viśvarūpa*. He is thus the all-knowing, unfathomable, creative power of the world. In this undifferentiate state, the god appears as archer whose one thousand arrows separate the non-existent from the existent, and who thereby heralds the creation of the world.⁵ In sum, the god who arises from the golden vessel reveals himself as the immeasurable, aggressive, omniscient god who immediately demands an eightfold segmentation to be designated by eight names.

Background on the choice of the eight names is elsewhere available;⁶ but the reason and significance for the number of names has so far not been commented upon. The idea of an eightfold god having eight names develops in the Brāhmaṇas. The Atharva Veda knows of the first seven names for they occur as appellations of separate gods in this text. The Vājasaneyi Saṃhitā uses two of the names, Bhava and Śarva, to designate Rudra, and the Atharva Veda (Śaunaka) calls the god, Ugra.⁷ Why then does the great god receive eight names (and thereby an eightfold form) if seven names are already available and three names are already applied to him? The number seems intentional since it reoccurs in a similar context in the Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa (see below). The rationale could relate to the conceptual property of "eight". On the basis of the "x plus one" formula, "eight" could signify the one (god) who encompasses the meanings and associations inhering in the number "seven". As a prime number, "seven" relates to the sacrifice; thus a "seven plus one" formula could symbolize a deity who is the perfection and completion of the sacrifice. Vedic Rudra-Śiva's relationship to the sacrificial remainder (see Chapter 5), expresses well this symbolism. There is thus support for an interpretation that connects eightfold Mahādeva to the preservation of the Vedic sacrifices. As a composite number, seven can be the result of 4 + 3 and 6 + 1. The first group, 4 + 3, recalling as it does the four quarters and the three vertical regions in space, represents all phenomenal space. If, to this meaning for "seven", a "one" or "a whole" is added, the resultant significance is "all space" making an eightfold deity one who encloses and surpasses phenomenal boundaries. Perhaps that is why seven of the eight names in the Kauṣītaki Brāhmaṇa are names coordinating with elements that sustain life on earth. The eightfold deity encompassing life-sustaining elements may represent the world's Sustainer and Preserver.

An image of Rudra, the archer in the Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa also evokes the image of Puruṣa. The image of the omniform archer occurs in a section explaining why the Śatarudrīya offering ought to be performed (IX.1.1.6). Rudra is the result of the Wrath of Prajāpati, now disjointed. The Wrath of Prajāpati became Rudra, hundred-headed, thousand-eyed and hundred quivered.⁸ The god with his bow strung and his arrow fitted to the bowstring makes the other gods afraid. Prajāpati counsels these deities to appease Rudra with the Śatarudrīya offering. The passage makes clear that Rudra surpasses other gods by his tremendous power; it is evident in his physical strength (symbolized by his

⁵ See Kramrisch, *Śiva*, Chapter II.

⁶ See J. Gonda, *Viṣṇuism and Śaivism*, London, 1970, pp. 36-41; R.G. Bhandarkar, *Vaiṣṇavism Śaivism and Minor Religious Systems*, Reprint. Varanasi, 1965, p. 105.

⁷ See Chapter 3, p. 39.

⁸ On the symbolic meanings and similarities between 100 and 1000, cf. Chapter 6, p. 74.

bow and arrows), his affective energy (symbolized by abiding wrath which he personifies), and his meta-physical potency (symbolized by his omniform structure). In another account of Rudra, the archer (Aitareya Brāhmaṇa III.33, 34), he is the avenger of Prajāpati's incestuous act. The gods sought One to punish Prajāpati. The One pierced Prajāpati with his arrows and thereby initiates creation. The final portion of the episode indicates the tension between this god, the other gods and worshippers. It states that one should refrain from addressing the god by his name, Rudra; he has been deprived of his claim which is the remainder and he must be approached carefully so that his mercy and not his anger is provoked.

The archer, wrathful and impetuous, opens the drama of creation. Whether or not he arises from the golden pot, he is also omniform. His *viśvarūpa* structure, based on the model of Puruṣa, announces his creative capacity. God's subsequent eightfold segmentation could well proclaim his ability to preserve that creation and to maintain the sacrifice.

In the Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa (see VI.1.3.8–18), the legend of the birth of the cosmic god varies from the account in the Kauṣītaki Brāhmaṇa. In this account, he has several fathers. His fathers are Prajāpati as the year and beings who represent the seasons. His mother is again Uṣas, the Dawn. Born in a year, the boy Kumāra, immediately demands his names from Prajāpati. His first name is Rudra, identified with Agni (fire); the second name is Sarva which is the waters; third is his name Paśupati identified with plants; his fourth name is Ugra equated with Vāyu (the wind); fifth is Aśani which is lightning; sixth is Bhava which is Parjanya (the rain god); his seventh name is Mahān Deva equated with the moon; his eighth name is Īśāna, identified with the sun. These are the eight forms of Agni who is identified here with the raudraic god.⁹ The son thus receives nearly the same eight names¹⁰ allied with nearly the same elements as in the Kauṣītaki Brāhmaṇa though the names and associations are shifted around. Nowise is the life-sustaining nature of the eightfold god jeopardised in this shift. The narrative allies each form of the raudraic god to a natural phenomenon, whose beneficial aspect can sustain life. This account does not directly employ the Puruṣa image. The creative nature of the deity is symbolized by his relation to Time. The embryo gestates a year, a creative unit *par excellence*.¹¹ Also, Kumāra is fathered by the year and the seasons, expressive of the wholeness of Time including its fixed divisions. Therefore the boy is born in the image of Time, creative, cyclic, unending.

The identification of Agni and Rudra¹² in the above account reminds of their addi-

⁹ The passage (VI.1.3.18) concludes: "Kumāra is the ninth; that is Agni's threefold state". J. Eggeling, *The Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*, Vol. XLI in *SBE*, p. 160. For a brief notice of the Vedic value of three times three, see J. Gonda, *Triads in the Vedas*, Amsterdam, Oxford, New York, 1976, pp. 20–21.

¹⁰ Different are Śarva in the Kauṣītaki Brāhmaṇa and Sarva in the Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa.

¹¹ The year comprises the beginning and end of a cycle in which regeneration occurs. Thus the sacrifice, probably as a cyclic process bearing fruit, is the year. The year equals the complete period of pregnancy; see J.C. Heesterman, *The Ancient Indian Royal Consecration*, Disputationes Rheno-Trajectinae, Vol. 2. The Hague, 1957, p. 28. For the year as "generative power" see Jan Gonda, *Prajāpati and the Year* Verhandelingen der Koninklijke Nederlandse Akademie van Wetenschappen, Afd. Letterkunde, Nieuwe Reeks, Deel 123, Amsterdam, Oxford, New York, 1984; pp. 8, 75, 78–79, 84, 91.

¹² Their identification is proclaimed throughout the Brāhmaṇas. For example, the Taittirīya Brāhmaṇa

tional, and indirect, connections with Puruṣa-Prajāpati. The identity of Agni and Rudra is intoned at the outset of the brāhmaṇa portion of the Śatarudrīya offering: "This entire Agni [fire-altar] has now been completed; he is now this god Rudra . . ." (ŚB IX.1.1.1).¹³ But the altar is not only Agni, it is also conceived of as the cosmic body of the Puruṣa-Prajāpati.¹⁴ On that account Rudra's symbolic identity is extended.¹⁵ Upon the completion of the piling up of the fire-altar Rudra becomes Agni, but he also become Puruṣa-Prajāpati whose structure is built into the altar. The chain of connections between Rudra/Agni/Puruṣa-Prajāpati is noticed elsewhere in the Brāhmaṇas. For example, Rudra promotes and preserves the sacrifice (*supra*). Agni too, is identified with the sacrifice (e.g. Pañcaviṃśa Brāhmaṇa XI.5.2); and the tradition for identifying Rudra, in the guise of Agni, with the sacrifice goes back to the Rig Veda.¹⁶ Now the sacrifice is also the *pratimā* of Prajāpati (Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa XI.1.8.2, 3), and thereby a connection between the three gods is established. Further, Kumāra, the raudraic god, is born in the image of the year, just as Agni is the year (Taittirīya Brāhmaṇa III.10.4;¹⁷ Pañcaviṃśa Brāhmaṇa X.12.7). Prajāpati too is often homologized to the year.¹⁸ Again a connection between the three gods is forged. So, in addition to the birth stories which establish Rudra's direct connection with Puruṣa-Prajāpati, the god is associated with symbols which also pertain to Puruṣa-Prajāpati.

Rudra's identification with Agni in the Brāhmaṇas may confirm certain numerical symbols employed with Rudra. Agni, emblematic of the Vedic fire ritual is often associated with the number "seven", the ritual number. Agni is seven layered; he has seven tongues and seven kindling sticks, etc.¹⁹ Upon completion of the seven layered altar, that is, the instant Agni becomes Rudra in the Agnicayana, the latter can be seen as the One who surpasses and comprises Sevenfold Agni. Here is possible justification that part of the symbolism inhering in eightfold Rudra relates to the domain of the sacrifice. God in this context epitomizes ritual completeness and ritual perfection.

It is impossible to read the major Brāhmaṇas and fail to be impressed by the stature Rudra attains. The birth stories of Rudra add yet another dimension to the manner in which his cosmic nature can be conceived. A hundred-headed, thousand-eyed and thousand-footed god may be seen as structurally equated with Cosmic Puruṣa the most potent Vedic *viśvarūpa* image. The son is fathered mainly by Prajāpati, the major creative force

(II.1.3), soon after establishing that Agni is Prajāpati's first-born (II.1.2), declares that indeed Agni is Rudra. See P.E. Dumont, "The Agnihotra (or the Fire Oblation) in the Taittirīya Brāhmaṇa", "the 1st Prapāthaka of the 2nd Kāṇḍa of the TB". *Proceedings of the American Philosophic Society* (hereafter *PAPS*) 108, 1964; under TB II.1.2.3. The Pañcaviṃśa Brāhmaṇa states their equivalency: "Agni is Rudra" (XII.4.24). The same text in XXI.2, 5–9 associates the three *ācyādoha* sāmans with Agni Vaiśvānara while in the Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa (II.254) these sāmans are called *raudrāṇi* (i.e. belonging to Rudra).

¹³ Eggeling, transl. *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*, Vol. XLIII in *SBE*, p. 156.

¹⁴ See Chapter 6, especially pp. 62, 65–68.

¹⁵ See quote from Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa VI.1.1.5 in Chapter 6, p. 62.

¹⁶ See Chapter 5, p. 51.

¹⁷ See P.E. Dumont, "The Special Kinds of Agnicayana (or special methods of building the fire-altar) according to the Kāthas in the Taittirīya-Brāhmaṇa (10th, 11th, 12th Prapāthakas of the Third Kāṇḍa of the TB)", *PAPS* 95, 1951, p. 636 re: TB III.10.4.

¹⁸ See J. Gonda, *Prajāpati and the Year*, Chapter 16.

¹⁹ See Chapter 4, p. 42.

in the Brāhmaṇas. The birth stories narrate the arising of a child whose body, like that of the father, is the cosmos itself. This is not the only way in which the cosmic nature of Rudra is visualized. The Śatarudrīya litany expresses the totality of Rudra not only by extolling the amazing diversity of life forms and forces that stem from him but also by dwelling upon the two bodies of Rudra. They represent his bipolar nature; the implication is that the benign and terrific bodies of this god represent both the good and bad forces in nature as well as all the dichotomies in phenomenality. Diversity is due to god's twofold nature which in effect comprises everything. These various probes into the god's cosmic nature, together with his links to the Vedic ritual and the Brāhmaṇa's chief progenitor bespeak of the eminence attained by Rudra at this religious stage. It is not difficult to envision, even at this early stage, a cult to Rudra replete with chanting, special rites, numerical symbolism and mental imagery of an omniform god. (The Śatarudrīya begins to be performed as "a mental sacrifice").²⁰ "Rudra is the oldest and best of the gods" (Kauṣītaki Brāhmaṇa XXV.13).²¹ "Rudra spreading himself goes – the best of the gods –" (Taittirīya Brāhmaṇa III.1.1.49). These laudations of the Vedic ritualists should have echoed the single-minded adoration of some worshippers.²² For them, Rudra is the best of gods. For us, "the best of gods" is linked to Puruṣa-Prajāpati, the quintessential *viśvarūpa* image of the Vedas.

B. Viṣṇu – as Sacrifice Connects with Puruṣa-Prajāpati

Viṣṇu is also the sacrifice.²³ Indeed this identification figures in the most important early legend of the god, namely the myth of his three strides. Viṣṇu as "sacrifice" connects the god with some of the above mentioned deities who also personify the ritual. The redactors of the Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa, for example, found no inconsistency in connecting the sacrifice first with Viṣṇu and then with Prajāpati (see I.2.5.3 & 12). The Taittirīya Brāhmaṇa exhibits the same fluctuations (III.1.6 – Viṣṇu is the sacrifice; III.2.3 – Prajāpati is the sacrifice; III.3.6 – Viṣṇu is the sacrifice, but in III.3.7 it is Prajāpati).

The three strides of Viṣṇu is a theme that reoccurs often in the Brāhmaṇas. It is noteworthy that Prajāpati, in Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa VI.7.4.1, produced creatures by means of the three Viṣṇu strides. The reference occurs in the Dīkṣā Ceremony, or the Initiation of the sacrificer for the performance of the Agnicayana. Performance of the Viṣṇu-strides in this context places an entity into a special sphere wherefrom generation can occur.

The sacrificer and Agni also come within Viṣṇu's orbit in this Dīkṣā. The sacrificer imitates Viṣṇu in taking three strides. Quite possibly he does this because Viṣṇu's third

²⁰ See Taittirīya Brāhmaṇa III.11.9 in P.E. Dumont, "Agnicayana", *PAPS* 95, p. 655.

²¹ A.B. Keith, transl. *Rigveda Brāhmaṇas* in *Harvard Oriental Series*, Vol. XXV, Cambridge, 1920, p. 494.

²² Other Taittirīya Brāhmaṇa passages with a devotional tone are III.7.2 and III.7.8.

²³ Some relevant passages in the Brāhmaṇas are: Gopatha Brāhmaṇa II.1.12; Pañcaviṃśa Brāhmaṇa IX.6.10; 7.5; 7.8; cf. 7.10; Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa I.2.5.4; 3.4.16; I.7.1.21; cf. III.1.3.1; III.6.3.3; VI.7.2.11; Kauṣītaki Brāhmaṇa XVI.8; Taittirīya Brāhmaṇa III.3.6, 3.7; 8.11.21. See also G.U. Thite, *Sacrifice in the Brāhmaṇa-Texts*, Poona, 1975, pp. 258–259; J. Gonda, *Aspects of Early Viṣṇuism* 2nd ed. Delhi, 1969, pp. 77ff.; especially 81–84.

step is in the god's own abode (cf. RV 1.154.5) and therefore denotes a heavenly (solar?) region. In any case, the sacrificer identifies himself with Viṣṇu and ascends with the third step to the world of the gods and becomes one of them: "Now he who is Viṣṇu is this sacrifice; and he who is this sacrifice is that same Agni in the *ukhā* (fire-pan): into that same (Agni) the gods changed themselves and strode through these worlds; and in like manner the Sacrificer, having changed himself into that same (Agni) strides through these worlds".²⁴

In the Dīkṣā of the Agnistoma, Agni and Viṣṇu are recognized as the terminal forms of the same sacrifice. The Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa²⁵ says that Agni is the lower half and Viṣṇu the upper half of the sacrifice; what is meant is that Agni is the earthly terminus and Viṣṇu is the highest or heavenly terminus. In this Dīkṣā, the two gods in effect protect the vertical zone within which the sacrificer makes offering. An oblation offered into the earthly fire is guaranteed safe passage upward into the realm of the gods since the ritual action is protected on the lower level by Agni (associated with the ritual fire on earth) and the upper level by Viṣṇu (associated with the heavenly sphere and his dear abode, reached by his third step).²⁶

Due to his identification with the sacrifice, Viṣṇu may be linked, indirectly, to the multiplicity symbolism in the Brāhmaṇas. The god's relation to the sacrificial *yūpa* (cf. Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa III.7.1.17), stemming, I would suppose, from his own association with the rites and the axis mundi, could claim for him a multiform (*bahurūpa*). Note that the Ṣaḍviṃśa Brāhmaṇa declares the *yūpa* as *bahurūpa* in IV.4.10, and in IV.4.17 associates this pillar with Viṣṇu's sphere.²⁷ The text then attributes to the *yūpa* a body (*śarira* allied to the seasons), a head (*śira* allied to the year), and phenomenal forms (*rūpas* allied to the Vedas).²⁸ The anthropomorphism of the *yūpa* reminds strongly of Skambha in the Atharva Veda, the *viśvarūpa* pillar emitting all materiality (see Chapter 3).

In perusing the Brāhmaṇas in search of linkages between Viṣṇu and Puruṣa-Prajāpati, it is not out of place to cite Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa XIII.6.1.1, wherein the god Nārāyaṇa, destined to become integrated within the vaiṣṇava godhead, is designated Puruṣa Nārāyaṇa. The citation may be kept in mind as a possible precursor to a development seen in the Mahā-Nārāyaṇa Upaniṣad. Here the great god Nārāyaṇa is equated with Puruṣa and he inherits the omniform structure of the Cosmic God.²⁹

If we now assess the general impact of the Brāhmaṇas upon the conceptualization of the multiplicity convention, two points dominate. First, in these texts whose purpose is to comment upon and explain the Vedic sacrifice, the sacrifice is identified, *inter alia*, with Puruṣa-Prajāpati, Rudra and Viṣṇu. As such, the highest good of this particular corpus

²⁴ Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa VI.7.2.11; see Eggeling, *SBE* XLI, p. 276.

²⁵ III.1.3.1.

²⁶ Accordingly, the sacrificer in the Dīkṣā includes an offering to Agni and Viṣṇu; see Aitareya Brāhmaṇa I.1; I.4; Kauṣītaki Brāhmaṇa VII.1; Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa III.1.3.1.

²⁷ The passage states: "he bend (probably turns) the sacrificial post to the east; this is Viṣṇu's highest step".

²⁸ IV.4.18.

²⁹ See Chapter 18, pp. 244–245.

is equated with the omniform creator Puruṣa-Prajāpati, and with gods who are, to a greater or lesser degree, associated with him. Rudra (-Śiva), and Viṣṇu, both of whom will develop into major Hindu gods and whose earliest images will be associated with the multiplicity convention, are here associated with the Brāhmaṇas' most grandiose creator god. Second, their association with Puruṣa-Prajāpati is announced *inter alia* in the most elaborate cosmological dramatization, the Agnicayana ritual. This is the sacrifice that actualizes the idea that the cosmic creator is pregnant with a multitude of forms in his womb and that a stage in the birth of the cosmos can be visualized as an act of cosmic parturition. It is also within the Agnicayana that Prajāpati uses Viṣṇu's three strides to produce creatures. Within the same rite, Rudra is portrayed omniform, in the manner of Puruṣa. And, the symbolic eight forms of Rudra are presented in the Agnicayana, directly after the completion of Prajāpati's creation of the universe by the emission process. The Agnicayana sacrifice thus links both Rudra and Viṣṇu (though more emphatically Rudra) to Puruṣa-Prajāpati at the same time that it demonstrates the liturgic vitality of the Saṃhitā's legacy concerning the multiplicity convention.

CHAPTER EIGHT

THE FULLNESS OF BRAHMAN

To what extent can the Upaniṣads contribute to our understanding of the multiplicity convention when the Saṃhitās and Brāhmaṇas have shown that the significance, the rationale and liturgical usages of the convention pertain to the domain of cosmic creation, a domain of marginal concern to the Upaniṣads? The domain of discourse in the Upaniṣads deals with the nature of the real behind phenomena rather than with origins of phenomenality. The shift is fundamental causing changes in the lines of inquiry. Whereas cosmogony preoccupies the talents of the Saṃhitās' and Brāhmaṇas' authors, neither the beginning nor the operation of the external world have the sustaining interest of the Upaniṣads' authors. However creation theories do continue to be offered, especially in the older Upaniṣads.¹

Perhaps the oldest Upaniṣad is the Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad, containing in its first Adhyāya some of the most original and significant creation theories in all the Upaniṣads.² There is additional reason for looking at this text in order to assess just how useful the Upaniṣads might be in furthering an understanding of the multiplicity convention. The Bṛhadāraṇyaka is attached to the Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa; it ends Book XIV of that Brāhmaṇa.³ It is therefore not only old but it is also appended to the Brāhmaṇa containing an elaborate explanation of the liturgy which employs the biological symbolism and rationale basic to the multiplicity convention. Explanations on the orthopraxy in the Agnicayana affirm that the birth of the cosmos is activated by an omniform Progenitor. His own body and the forms he emits (re-)establish existence. Therefore, a look at creation theories in the Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad (BAU) may be the best beacon we have to illuminate the sort of evidence the Upaniṣads can deliver regarding the multiplicity convention.

The BAU contains several creation theories which do not present an internally consistent approach to the problem of cosmogony. Nonetheless the theories outlined below maintain a biological view of creation, namely that phenomenality is caused by the labours of some sort of generating Power.

¹ See, for example, N.N. Bhattacharyya, *History of Indian Cosmogonical Ideas*, New Delhi, pp. 7–9.

² Paul Deussen, *Philosophy of the Upanishads*, Dover Publication, New York, 1966, p. 188.

³ See pp. 22–23 in Herman W. Tull, *The Vedic Origins of Karma*, Albany, 1989, for areas wherein there is continuity of themes between the Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa and the Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad.

A
BAU I.4.1-7

In this account, an evolutionary process culminating with phenomenal forms begins with Ātman (masc.), in the form of Puruṣa (*puruṣavidha*). This entity, the unformulated Self as Cosmic Male experiences consciousness and becomes conscious of the Self; this causes the arising of the formulated Person whose name is "I". Recognizing his aloneness, he desires a second. Splitting himself in half, he becomes two generating bodies: himself as "husband" and the second as "wife". These two copulate to produce humans and all the different pairs of animals. In this way, life forms are the final outcome of a threefold evolutionary process. It unfolds as follows: 1) Ātman as Puruṣa 2) Ātman as Puruṣa whose name is "I" and whose form is Creation⁴ 3) Male husband and Female wife who are the generating couple.

1. In the beginning this universe was only Ātman in the form of Puruṣa. He, looking around, saw nothing other than Ātman [i.e. himself]. He, in the beginning, uttered "I am". Thus arose the name "I" . . .

2. He was afraid. Therefore he who is alone is afraid. He then thought, "Since there is none other than I, of what am I afraid"? Exactly then his fear left him . . .

3. Certainly he had no delight. Therefore one who is alone has no delight. He desired a second. He was as large (*etāvat*) as a woman and a man closely embraced. He caused this Self (*ātman*) to divide into two. Then a husband (*pati*) and a wife (*patnī*) came into being. Therefore this [is so]: "Oneself is like a half-fragment" [i.e. half of a whole?] as Yajñavalkya used to say. Therefore this space is filled with a woman. Then he united with her. Therefrom human beings were born.

4. Then she thought: "How does he unite with me even though he has generated (*janayitvā*) me from [his own] Self . . .

[Thereupon the female hides herself, becoming different animals, down to the ant. She becomes a cow, a mare, a female ass, a she-goat, an ewe and an ant. The Male changes himself to all the corresponding male forms and copulates with her. That is how all pairs of creatures were created.]

5. He knew, "I am truly this creation (*śṛṣṭir*). I emitted (*aśṛkṣi*) all this". Therefore he became creation (*śṛṣṭir*) . . .

6. [Next, the creator emits various gods; he himself is all gods. This, namely the gods, is the higher creation of Brahman . . .]

7. At that time, this [world] was undifferentiated. Indeed it became differentiated just by means of name and form (*nāmarūpa*). So it is said, "He has this name; he has this form". Even now this [world] is differentiated just by name and form . . . [The creator then enters into creation so as to be coextensive with all phenomenality but not identifiable with any particular form or act.]

⁴ J.A.B. van Buitenen, "Studies in Sāṃkhya (ii)", *JAOS* 77, 1957; 17.

Ātman in the form of Puruṣa is an elegant transition from the religious outlook epitomized by the ritual texts to the speculative penchant of this early Upaniṣad. Now the primordial Power, Ātman-Puruṣa, is the sole existent and it is undifferentiated, unstructured in the beginning. As such, at the time of pre-creation, there is the Self in the shape of the Male. This is the first stage. The essence of Ātman as Puruṣa is creation and the first thing that is created is individuality, otherwise designated as "name and form", or, "I". It should not be regarded as unusual that creation is attributed to an impersonal entity (Self or Ātman) connected with a personal entity (Puruṣa). The BAU, in keeping with earlier Vedic texts, intermingles personal and impersonal notions about the Supreme. Earlier examples are found in Skambha of the Atharva Veda hymns,⁵ or in Brahman (neut.) who is able to speak and perform *tapas* in Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa XIII.7.1.1. The Upaniṣads, especially the ancient ones, show that Indian thinkers do not sharply differentiate between the personal and impersonal idea of the Supreme nor do they resolutely distinguish between the animate and inanimate. On the other hand, they give a great deal of attention to the reason *why* the Supreme creates. What provokes it to do so? The BAU takes the position that in the beginning an unformulated (but not abstract) primordial Being realized his capacity for creation as a result of an act of self-recognition. "Here I am" is a cry that brings about the name "I" and accordingly the form "I". We may say that the unformulated, or, undifferentiated primordial Being has produced individuality. The individual is Ātman-Puruṣa called "I" in the shape of the cosmos. The individual is therefore a Cosmic Man, a "somebody"⁶ whose cosmic dimensions are symbolized by his largeness and his androgynous form. This is the second stage. The individualized Ātman-Puruṣa is as large (*etāvat*) as a man and woman together. *Etāvat* is a term that can relate to spatial amplitude and dimensions, but not to largeness in the sense of "liberality" or "eminence". He is so large because he is the container of all phenomenal forms. The text does not express this idea by recourse to the omniform nature of the Cosmic Man; rather it specifies that his size is as big as a man and a woman in close embrace. In the Indian idiom, the joining of the male and female symbolizes the sum total of phenomenal dichotomies and diversities. Male and female conjoint therefore allude to the stage prior to the appearance of phenomenal forms. Thus the largeness of the Cosmic Male bespeaks of his androgynous nature which precedes the birth of the world. We are reminded of Puruṣa in the Puruṣasūkta who is also androgynous but whose potential for expulsion of cosmic diversity is expressed by his having a thousand heads, a thousand eyes and a thousand feet, that is, by his being omniform. Another important similarity exists between the ancient Puruṣa and the Upaniṣadic Puruṣa: both Rig Vedic Puruṣa and the BAU's individualized Cosmic Male generate a male and a female. However Virāj and Puruṣa, generated by the Rig Vedic Puruṣa, are not the parents of the world, as is the case with Pati and Patnī in the BAU.⁷ This couple represents the third stage.

⁵ See Chapter 3, pp. 35–36.

⁶ Cf. J.A.B. van Buitenen, "The Large Ātman", *History of Religions* 4.1, 1964; p. 108.

⁷ The antecedents for Pati and Patnī could well go back as far as Yama and Yamī, born from the womb of omniform Tvaṣṭṛ, and recognized as the primeval twins that produced mankind. See Chapter 2, p. 24.

In that Pati and Patnī are capable of generating all creatures it must be assumed that they received this capacity from their progenitor, the Cosmic Man called "I"; accordingly the individualized Cosmic Man should have an omniform nature although his largeness stresses more a sense of fullness than a sense of manifoldness.

In sum, cosmogony as detailed in BAU I.4.1–7 becomes the prototype for somatology, or, the "body" image in the unfolding of creation. The creation theory introduces a three-stage cosmogonic unfolding which is based on a threefold somatology. Although aspects of each stage can have Vedic antecedents, the idea of three successive cosmic "bodies" unfolding is an innovation. The first "body" is the unformulated unitary plenum, Ātman as Puruṣa. As this "body" experiences consciousness there arises through an act of autogenesis, the second "body". This is the creator "body". He is a large somebody; an individual who can experience aloneness and desire, which become the causes for the "second" body to split in half and produce the third "body". It is, in actuality "a pair". They continue to have the potential for the generation of all forms and indeed actualize their potential in becoming the parents of creatures. In this triune unfolding, the third, or last, stage is the direct cause of earthly forms. The second stage is an individualized Male aware that he is creation. He exercises consciousness of Self in that "he knows". And what he knows is that he alone emits all that which pertains to creation. He therefore represents a Being, separate from and below the non-individualized, unformulated Self, the Person without Self-recognition of the first stage.

The idea of a large Cosmic Person whose body is creation becomes prominent in Upaniṣadic thinking. However, the idea of "large" is more often expressed by *mahat* than by *etāvat* in the Upaniṣads. Specifically, *mahat* can refer to the huge spatial dimensions of the first embodiment arising from the unformulated creative Power. Other terms such as *bahu* "much", *bhūman* "muchness", *mahiman* "largeness" and *pūrṇa* "full, fullness" also convey this meaning. These terms emphasize colossal size, together with extreme amplitude. The Being described in this way also is designated by specific terms. Most often the terms used are *ātman* or *puruṣa*, but also *yakṣa* can be used. Indeed BAU 5.4.1 refers to the first embodiment of creation as "*mahad yakṣam*". The large Being has the urge, as BAU I.4.1–7 shows, to create the universe. But the large Being does not directly cause creation as there is now a hierarchy. The large Being is the first evolute out of the unformulated, and he is the intermediate step leading towards the completion of creation. The Cosmic Man called "I" and by implication *mahat yakṣa*, both of the BAU, represent a macranthropic view of the unfolding universe. The creator, of the second stage, is a large, androgynous force, successfully distanced from fear, who is capable of the emission process leading towards the birth of the world. As such, specific attributes pertaining to the Agnicayana's motherly Male are absent in this section of the Bṛhadāraṇyaka though a creator who emits forms from within is not far removed from a motherly Male; also the specific mythopoeic imagery of the Agnicayana's Pregnant Male is not apparent in this section of the Upaniṣad, again, though the concept of the Cosmic Male, large due to cosmic fullness is not far removed from a Pregnant Male. Echoes of the birth-giving Puruṣa-Prajāpati remain, but they now define a deity belonging to a second stage of divine unfolding leading to the birth of the cosmos. That is new.

B

BAU I.4.11–15

This creation theory postulates Brahman alone in the beginning. The postulate could suggest that the Supreme is, herein, a neuter, abstract principle. But the intermingling and vacillation on whether the Supreme is an impersonal, neuter principle or a personal, masculine power continues, causing Brahman to be designated “It” at times and “He” at other times. So the account opens that in the beginning “It” was solitary in that “He” had not fully expanded.⁸ We may say that Brahman was not fully unfolded. It created the social classes and the gods pertaining to these classes by means of the emission process. Brahman is the source, the womb, of the Kṣātra class and though he is the source of the other classes as well, the account does not specify from which part of Brahman they originate. The theory does indicate that Brahman, is to be found in this world for it has caused itself to appear in two forms: Agni (or, sacrificial fire) among gods, and, as the Brahman among men.

11. In the beginning, this [universe] was Brahman alone. It being one was not fully expanded. That One created further a superior form, Kṣātrahood, even those who among the gods represent the Kṣātra-power: Indra, Varuṇa, Soma, Rudra, Parjanya, Yama, Mṛtyu and Īśāna. Therefore there is none higher than the Kṣātra. . . . Brahman is the womb of the Kṣātra. . . . Therefore even though a king attains the highest position, in the end he resorts to Brahman, his own womb. . . .

12. He [i.e. Brahman] was not fully expanded. He emitted the Viś, [even] those types of gods who are known by groups: Vasus, Rudras, Ādityas, Viśvadevas and Maruts.

13. He was not fully expanded. He emitted the Śūdra class, Puṣan. Indeed this [earth] is Puṣan. This [earth] nourishes all this whatsoever.

14. He was not fully expanded. That One emitted further a superior form, Dharma. Dharma is the Kṣātra-power of the Kṣātra (class). Therefore there is nothing higher than Dharma. . . .

15. Therefore this Brahman [appears as] the Kṣātra, the Viś, the Śūdra. Indeed Brahman became Agni among the gods, the Brahman among men, the Kṣātriya by the Kṣātriya, the Vaiśya by the Vaiśya, the Śūdra by the Śūdra. Therefore people desire a place among the gods in Agni [i.e. the sacrificial fire], among men in Brahman. By these two forms (*rūpa*) Brahman appeared.

Features from the ancient Puruṣa model also surface in this account as they did in the first account, even though there is not much overt similarity between these two BAU creation theories. Application of the Puruṣa model is most obvious in the arising of the four classes and the gods from Brahman, just as they originate from the body of Puruṣa in the Puruṣasūkta (RV 10.90.12, 13). However, even though origination continues to be by the process of emission (for Puruṣa see Chapter 2, p. 26; for Brahman note the verbs: \sqrt{srj} ; *ati* + \sqrt{srj} in BAU I.4. 5, 11, 13, 14), some significant developments, absent in

⁸ J.A.B. van Buitenen, “The Large Ātman” p. 104: “not fully expanded” is the sense of *sa naiva vyabhavat*.

the earlier model, occur. Now the source of emission is Brahman's womb; earlier, in the *Puruṣasūkta*, different parts of *Puruṣa*'s own body were either the source of emission or they constituted the element transformed into some aspect of creation. So, along with many other organs giving rise to the world, *Puruṣa*'s navel is mentioned, but the womb or belly of *Puruṣa* is not mentioned in the *Rig Veda*.⁹ The Upaniṣadic image has left far behind the image of quartering the Supreme to achieve creation and that may help explain why the arising of creatures is no longer traced back to four segments of the creator. Also, the Upaniṣadic image is rooted in a Vedic tradition which posits the womb as the chamber of creation and the place wherefrom all is expelled. The tradition is not infrequently allied to creation theories involving *Prajāpati*. The *Agnicayana* portion in the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* mentions the womb of *Puruṣa-Prajāpati* repeatedly; it is the wellspring of mankind; it is the birth-chamber of the Primordial Pregnant Male.¹⁰ In the story of *Rudra*'s birth told in the *Kauṣītaki Brāhmaṇa*,¹¹ a golden vessel held by *Prajāpati* until the son arises, represents something akin to his external womb-chamber. In these instances, *Prajāpati* inherits a notion already well formulated in the *Rig Veda*, namely that a Male Progenitor can give birth to the world by emitting worldly forms from his womb.¹² The *Vājasaneyi Saṃhitā* (VS), posits the Primordial Womb as being even superior to *Prajāpati* and in this way best anticipates the spirit of the Upaniṣadic image: in VS 31.19 the Womb contains even *Prajāpati*.¹³ Thus a masculine cosmic source has been replaced by a more remote, more abstract, though still biologically rooted ultimate source, The Womb, writ large. From the *Vājasaneyi Saṃhitā*'s position, the womb of Brahman as stipulated in BAU I.4.11 is just a step away.

Brahman is the womb of the *Kṣatra*, but there seems to be a creation higher than the *Kṣatra*; it is *Dharma*, the *Kṣatra*-power of the *Kṣatra* class (BAU I.4.14). That means that the three social classes are superseded by a higher creation. (Ostensibly, the fourth class namely Brahmanhood, is of the nature of Brahman Itself and therefore is not to be counted along with the lower three orders.) I therefore detect in this theory another conceptualization pertaining to a triune unfolding of the Supreme. More abstract, this series comprises: Brahman/*Dharma*/the social classes and their corresponding gods. However the progression leading towards phenomenality does not appear to be linear. To state it another way, *Dharma* does not give rise to the social classes or to the corresponding gods. For our purposes interest in this series concentrates on the second stage. God *Dharma* reveals himself in what appears to be an analogous hierarchical position in the *Mahābhārata*. In *Mhbh.* III.297–299, *Dharma*, “the god of gods” reveals himself to his son, the *Kṣatriya* prince *Yudhiṣṭhira* first as an apparitional form called “*Yakṣa*”. Then upon the prodding of *Yudhiṣṭhira* the *Yakṣa* discloses himself to be *Bhagavān Dharma*. Clearly in both the BAU and the epic, *Dharma* occupies an intermediate theological position which in both cases is above *Kṣatriyas* and *Kṣatra*hood. This position

⁹ Note that the “birth-giving organ” of [*Puruṣa*-] *Prajāpati* is introduced in the creation myth of *Jaiminiya Brāhmaṇa* I.68, 69. See Chapter 6, p. 2.

¹⁰ See Chapter 6, pp. 62–68.

¹¹ See Chapter 7, p. 76.

¹² See Chapter 2, pp. 24–25.

¹³ See Chapter 4, pp. 42–43.

belongs also to "Yakṣa" in both the texts; the epic considers the big-bodied Yakṣa as Dharma and BAU (5.4.1 *supra*) considers *mahad yakṣam* as the embodied first creation. The conclusion that "the large Yakṣa" seems to belong to the second stage of a triune unfolding has capital importance for the origin of Hindu icons with the multiplicity convention and this is discussed fully in Chapter 14.

The prevailing emphasis of this creation theory must now be registered. The emphasis is on a creator who desires to unfold until his creative capacity has been fulfilled. He keeps on creating because "he was not fully expanded". This expression is repeated prior to each further creation. The emphasis is on a creator who is filled with creation and who fulfills himself by bringing out the fullness within himself. The desire of Brahman to unfold fully is similar to the individualized Ātman as Puruṣa who desired a mate, splits in half to produce one, and the resultant couple keeps on creating till everything is created. In both accounts, a creator procreates to complete his function and to give expression to his fullness. There have been creative demiurges before who desire and whose desires lead to the formulation of the universe. "In the beginning desire arose in That One which became the first seed of the mind" intones RV 10.129.4, an ancient representation of the idea. Closer in time to the BAU is the Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa's account of Prajāpati who is the god of birth in the beginning; he too desires to become many and to propagate himself, and proceeds to do just that.¹⁴ There have been omniform demiurges before who initiate creation by emitting their store. There is the Yajur Vedic storehouse of existence, hidden, secret and capable of activating creation;¹⁵ there is the Atharva Vedic Skambha in whom dwells the whole universe, possessed of *ātman*, and who begins the emission process.¹⁶ These demiurges remind us that aspects of the creators in the Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad are connected to speculative probings in the Vedas that extend back to the most ancient literary stratum.

But this Upaniṣad can turn its back on preceding mythopoeic imagery when it speculates on the condition of the creator after he has expanded fully. Let us first recall what happened in the Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa to Puruṣa-Prajāpati after he achieved creation by bringing out the forms from within. He fell apart. His body parts relaxed. His fullness left him and he was empty. The multivalent fullness pertaining to the creator and his capacity for creation is what the Agnicayana restores. Now comes a concept in a verse from the text appended to the Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa, and it alludes to the inexhaustible plentitude of Brahman, (BAU 5.1.1). Remarkably, fullness remains even after fullness has been taken away:

Fullness beyond, fullness here
Fullness from Fullness doth proceed
From fullness fullness take away
Fullness yet remains¹⁷

¹⁴ See Chapter 6, pp. 60-61.

¹⁵ See Chapter 4, p. 43.

¹⁶ See Chapter 3, p. 36.

¹⁷ R.C. Zaehner, *Hindu Scriptures*, Everyman's Library, London, New York, 1966, p. 76.

Verse 5.1.1 expresses the belief that Brahman is complete, never lacking, eternally full even when it has emitted an evolute. The term for “fullness” in this passage is *pūrṇa*; like *mahat*, *bhūman* etc., the term can designate fullness that bespeaks of the plentitude within a generative power. The verse describes the nature of the two bodies of Brahman as they are defined in BAU II.3, to which we will come, below. Suffice it to point out at this juncture that BAU 5.1.1 stipulates that neither the transcendental creator (the “Fullness beyond”, or [using the theological vocabulary from the BAU introduced thus far], Brahman, or Ātman in the form of Puruṣa) nor its evolute (*pūrṇam idaṃ*, the “Fullness here” or, Dharma, or, the large Ātman in the form of Puruṣa called “I”, or Mahat Yakṣa) experiences exhaustion, or loses fullness, or lacks creative potency because of the emission process. We may say, the unformulated Self (BAU II.3 will call it “the uncreated Brahman”) is *pūrṇa*, and, the formulated Self as Puruṣa, or, the Cosmic Man “I” (the BAU II.3 will call it “the created Brahman”) is also *pūrṇa*. I propose that the compatibility noticed here between the term *pūrṇa* and the connotation “internal bounty of the creative Plenum” is maintained when at a later stage the *pūrṇaghata* is used as ideograph for the fertile womb chamber associated with images of Maha Yakṣa and the Birth-Giving Goddess (see Pls. 15.6, 8, 11, 19).¹⁸

The multiplicity convention is not evident in the above two creation theories though both describe cosmic Powers who create by means of the emission process.¹⁹ The creation theories in BAU I.4 indicate that a creative power, even one attributed “a womb”, need not be designated by the multiplicity convention. The creative ability of a Power can be designated by the voluminous amplitude of the creator. I suspect, however, that conceptually “fullness” and “omniform” are already intimately connected (see Maitrāyaṇīya Upaniṣad, below). Brahman, though unmanifest, unevolved and inscrutable in the above BAU passage, is not a non-entity. On the contrary, Brahman, the first stage and ultimate creative Power, equates with the Eternal Plenum.

¹⁸ See Chapter 15, pp. 198; 200–202.

¹⁹ Interestingly, both the older and the younger Upaniṣads continue to mention the multiple bodily parts and forms of the more ancient cosmic creators, namely Indra, Tvaṣṭṛ, Prajāpati, Tvaṣṭṛ’s son Viśvarūpa and possibly Sūrya, though reinterpretations are possible. So for example, Indra’s ability to assume many forms is stated and reinterpreted in BAU 2.5.19, a verse repeating the Rīg Vedic verse 6.47.18. The Rīg Vedic multiplicity image is understood to refer to the Brahman in the BAU selection (see Section E, below). In the Taittirīya Upaniṣad (1.4.1), the teacher who prays for special knowledge may be attributing to Indra a *viśvarūpa* nature. Tvaṣṭṛ is mentioned as the one who shapes forms (BAU 6.4.21); the context is the impregnation of the wife and thus is similar to the context of AVŚ 5.25.5 (see Chapter 3, p. 34). In Kauṣītaki Upaniṣad 3.1, Indra tells that he slew the three-headed Viśvarūpa (see Chapter 2, fn. 2). In Kauṣītaki Upaniṣad 2.9, the moon is identified with five-faced (*pañcamukha*) Prajāpati; this is the first occurrence of the term *pañcamukha*. In Praśna Upaniṣad, Prajāpati, who is identified with the year (1.9), may be the “father who has five-feet and twelve shapes” (1.11 = RV 1.164.12); the year has five seasons and twelve months. In BAU 1.5.14 where Prajāpati is again the year, he is composed of sixteen parts. In sum, it may be that authors of the Upaniṣads choose when to use the multiplicity convention and when to refer to the fullness of god to describe a progenitor. A text like the BAU supports the likelihood that choices were made, for the text shows a good understanding of the significance of both types of descriptions. BAU 4.3.9–13 shows an understanding for the correct usage of the multiplicity convention. The passages describe the self in the dreaming state. The things seen in a dream are projections from the self. The self is a creator. In effect, the dreamer is likened to a god who makes many forms (cf. BAU 4.3.13). The significance assigned to multiple bodily parts and forms in the Saṃhitās, especially Definitions 1 and 3, is preserved here.

C
BAU I.4.16-17

This section also speaks of the creator who needs to fulfill his creative capacity, or as the text says, who is “incomplete”, until the desire to procreate all things is accomplished. Ātman is the abode of all phenomenal things. (see 16). Section 17 elaborates: In the beginning this [universe] was just Ātman quite alone. He desired, “May there be a wife for me, then I would procreate. Then may there be gain for me, then I would do my work. So great is this desire, even if wishing more, he would not find it [i.e. “more”] . . . As long as he does not obtain any one of these, he thinks that he is incomplete. His completeness [is made up of:] the mind as the self (*ātman*); the voice as the wife; the breath as offspring, the eye as worldly gain . . . , the ear as heavenly [gain] . . . This is the fivefold sacrifice. . . . This is the fivefold man (*puruṣa*).²⁰ Fivefold is all this [universe] whatever there is. . . .

The theme of the creator who desires to give expression to his fullness is here repeated together with several biological symbols for creation (i.e. “the wife”, “procreation”, “the offspring”). Of considerable interest is that “fullness” or “completeness” is a fivefold phenomenon though the fivefold nature of neither man nor god is new. Nor are the specific bodily components of the Ātman new; they have already been introduced in BAU I.4.7 where these five different functions (to wit, breathing/breath; speaking/voice; seeing/the eye; hearing/the ear; thinking/the mind) are identified with Ātman. The interest lies in the homologies established with the fivefold creator. He is equated with the fivefold sacrifice, fivefold man, and, the fivefold universe. In a real sense, the last creation image in BAU I.4 is more closely related to the mystical equivalencies established in the Agnicayana than the preceding two. It will be remembered that the successful outcome of the Agnicayana depends upon a recognition that the fivefold cosmos, the fivefold altar, the fivefold creator and man homologize.²¹

It is noteworthy that BAU I.4.16-17 exhibits a continuity with some religious symbolism in the Brāhmaṇa tradition. This being so, it is unrealistic to postulate a gap between the teachings and outlook of an Upaniṣad and the Brāhmaṇa to which it is connected. Speculative advances need not therefore come by casting aside religious dogma. As we approach the development of imageries concerning the multiplicity convention we ought not, I believe, envision a situation where one set (or several sets) of ideas wiped out preceding ones. It may be more accurate to consider that Upaniṣadic beliefs could have been advanced by some groups of people who had no need or predilection to forget or dismiss all the religious ideologies set forth in the Brāhmaṇas associated with their particular lineage.

²⁰ See also George W. Brown, *The Human Body in the Upanishads* (Johns Hopkins University, Ph.D. Dissertation), Jubbulpore, 1921, Chapter II, for a discussion on the five components of the body. Cf. also Taittirīya Upaniṣad 1.7 which compares fivefold nature to the fivefold individual.

²¹ See Chapter 6, p. 72, for the desired ritual outcome for the sacrificer, the world and the god, Puruṣa-Prajāpati, and, for mystical equivalences based on the number five.

D
BAU II.3

Two forms (*rūpa*) of Brahman are differentiated with particular clarity in BAU II.3. The higher form is the uncreated, immaterial form called *amūrta*. The lower form is defined in relation to the higher and is called *mūrta*, that is, the created, embodied form. These two forms according to the descriptions in this section are symmetrically opposed to each other. Thus *amūrta* Brahman is immortal (*amṛta*), moving (*yat*) and beyond (*tya*) (see BAU II.3.1); *mūrta* Brahman is mortal (*mṛta*), immobile (*sthita*) and actual (*sat*).²² The *amūrta* form is understood to be wind and atmosphere, indicative that It is an unsolid, unformulated yet a pervasive entity; whatever is different from wind and atmosphere is the *mūrta* Brahman, indicative that It is a solid, formulated entity.

BAU III.7.15 gives this view of the *amūrta* Brahman: "He who dwells in all beings, who is within all beings, whom all beings do not know, of whom all beings are the body, who controls all beings from within, he is your Self, the inner Controller, the immortal One". The pervasive, unformulated, higher Brahman is here equated with the Self dwelling in man. As such, the higher Brahman is the immortal core of man, the Ātman, which functions as his inner controller. It is rather remarkable to find that in a theological discourse relating to the soul of man the theological language still alludes to the body-image. The higher Brahman has a body; moreover, it is composed of all beings. Not only does the somatological image of god persist, but it persists with a Power understood to be unsolid, unformulated and immortal. The fact that *amūrta* Brahman (as Ātman) is in all beings and they in turn comprise his body is an old, established way of attributing the evolution and involution of creation to one sole source. The notion operates in the Skambha hymns of the Atharva Veda, where Skambha is already sketched in limited anthropomorphic terms.²³ The sections in the Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa dealing with the Agnicayana probably offer the best antecedents for the body-of-Brahman image in the BAU. The cosmic body of Puruṣa-Prajāpati contains everything pertaining to the world-ground, not only creatures and their environment but also the ideas and conventions that creatures can entertain.²⁴

Once again, the BAU demonstrates continuity with the ideology of its associated Brāhmaṇa. That the body-of-god imagery persists in spite of the philosophic nature of the upaniṣadic context augurs well that the image could persist into the more theistic Upaniṣads where in any case, the image would be more at home. The possibility cannot be discounted that this early Upaniṣad provides both the precedence and backing for the body-of-God images in the later theistic Upaniṣads (see Chapters 9 & 10).

²² Cf. Paul Deussen, *Sixty Upaniṣads of the Veda*, Pt. I. transl. by V.M. Bedekar and G.B. Pasule, 1st ed., Delhi 1980, p. 431; P. Deussen, *The Philosophy of the Upanishads*, transl. by Rev. A.S. Geden, Dover publ. 1966, p. 129.

²³ See Chapter 3, pp. 35–36.

²⁴ See Chapter 6, pp. 64–66.

E
MU II.1.1-10

Already the Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad, which is prior to the theistic Upaniṣads, anticipates the image of a macrocosmic body belonging to the personal God. This Upaniṣad stipulates that the highest (called *amūrta*) is a person (i.e. *puruṣa*) endowed with a macrocosmic body. MU II.1.2 knows *amūrta* Puruṣa to be heavenly and unborn, yet subsequent verses describe his body.²⁵ Fire is his head; his eyes the moon and sun, the regions are his ears, the Vedas his voice; wind is his breath, his heart is the whole world. And out of his feet, or his lowest part, comes the earth (see II.1.4). *Amūrta* Puruṣa is a cosmic being built upon the model formulated long ago in the *Puruṣasūkta*. Like the Rig Vedic Puruṣa model, *amūrta* Puruṣa also contains all creation in his cosmic body. The greater part of MU II.1 recounts the forms of existence which he emits. *Amūrta* Puruṣa emits fire; rain, herbs, creatures (cf. II.1.5). From him²⁶ arise the three Vedas and the Vedic initiation rite (*dikṣā*), all Vedic sacrifices, ceremonies and sacrificial fees (*dakṣiṇā*). The year, the sacrificer and the worlds originate from him (cf. II.1.6). So too, the gods, the *Sādhyas* (cf. RV 10.90.7.16), mortals, cattle birds (cf. RV 10.90.8, 10, 12), the different breaths, foods, religious fervour, faith, truth, chastity and sacred law (cf. II.1.7). From him proceed the physical worlds, their form and fertilizing germ (cf. II.1.9). "Puruṣa is all this world" states MU II.1.10, recalling the words of RV 10.90.2: "Puruṣa is this whole universe, what was and what is yet to be". But, *amūrta* Puruṣa not only reflects a long-standing model; a combination of eight elements proceed from him which pre-figure the eight elements in the Sāṃkhya system (see II.1.3).²⁷ These elements issue from Puruṣa before all else, save *akṣara*, the first evolute or lower Brahman. The evolutionary sequence can be ascertained when MU II.1.2 is read in conjunction with MU II.2.2. The first citation defines *amūrta* Puruṣa as, *inter alia*, *aprāṇa* and *amanas*, and the second defines *akṣara* as *prāṇa* and *manas*. *Akṣara* like Puruṣa is creative: from *akṣara* beings are born. Therefore the difference between *amūrta* Brahman and *akṣara* Brahman is not based upon function. Since the former emits creation from a macrocosmic body, it may be postulated that the latter likewise is a source of encompassing fullness. To be sure, the seeker of truth must go beyond knowledge of the lower Brahman which MU I.1.9 identifies with food, and name and form (*nāmarūpa*); he must seek *dīvyā* Puruṣa (MU III.2.8; cf. II.1.2). The kernel of this idea is already expressed in Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa XI.2.3.1-5. Here Brahman emits two *Yakṣas* known as Name and Form. The *Yakṣas* in this Brāhmaṇa passage, as the *Yakṣa* in BAU V.4, are the first evolutes of Brahman.

In sum, both these older Upaniṣads teach that creation occurs as a result of the progressive evolution of a meta-physical higher force whose creative powers are defined by fullness. This force emits a lower entity which is also distinguished by fullness. The first

²⁵ *Amūrta* is not immaterial but unsolid. (J.A.B. van Buitenen "Sāṃkhya ii", 21).

²⁶ The ablative here, as in the *Puruṣasūkta*, is used to designate the source wherefrom proceeds the emission process.

²⁷ See J.A.B. van Buitenen, "Studies in Sāṃkhya I", *JAOS* 76.3, 153ff.

evolute can be thought of as a created subtle entity (*akṣara*), or a created embodied form (*mūrta* Brahman), or a huge subtle Being (Dharma; mahat yakṣa), or the fullness this side of existence (*pūrṇam idam*), or the formulated, conscious Self as the Large Individual (*etāvān Ātman-Puruṣa*). Constant to all these designations is that the first evolute inherits the fullness of its source. The fullness within now symbolizes the ability to generate creation much as multiple bodily parts used to bespeak of the birth-giving powers of the creator gods. In the Upaniṣads, Brahman surpasses and subsumes all gods, including their multiplicity designations. So, for example, the Rig Vedic verse proclaiming Indra's ability to create forms (RV 6.47.18) is repeated in the Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad to indicate Brahman's limitlessness and completeness.

"He [Ātman-Brahman] verily is tens and thousands, many and endless", states BAU II.5.19 when explaining the meaning of the repeated verse.

F

Maitrāyaṇīya Upaniṣad VI.3-8

If we now close this discussion on the fullness of Brahman with the Maitrāyaṇīya Upaniṣad, we will have traced to its completion the development thus far outlined. In this late work, *amūrta* Brahman, the transcendental macrocosmic body, is considered to be omniform, or *viśvarūpa*. This text is a veritable compendium of upaniṣadic thought. It knows of Sāṃkhya notions. It borrows from the older Upaniṣads (including the Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad), and also from the younger theistic Upaniṣads (including the Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad).

The Maitrāyaṇīya Upaniṣad mentions with telling refinements the two forms of Brahman considered in BAU II.3.1. The Brahman is distinguished by the higher (uncreated, *amūrta*) and the lower (created, *mūrta*) form. *Mūrta* Brahman is the Untrue form, and *Amūrta* Brahman is the True and Light, which is the light of the sun identified with Om̐ (VI.3).²⁸ Kept is the belief expressed in the BAU that *amūrta* Brahman is not immaterial but unsolid. The identification between the uncreated Brahman and Om̐, composed of three letters (a + u + m), opens the way for associating Brahman with a series of triads, the most interesting of which is the set Brahmā-Rudra-Viṣṇu (VI.5). It is in advocating the worship of Brahman that a verse is cited (in VI.8), which attributes an omniform nature to the higher Brahman:

The omniform (*viśvarūpa*), the yellow-coloured, all-knowing
Last refuge, the light, the heated one
The sun of a thousand rays, the *prāṇa* of creatures,
which augments in a hundred ways, rises.²⁹

²⁸ J.A.B. van Buitenen, *The Maitrāyaṇīya Upaniṣad: A Critical Essay with text, transl. and commentary*, The Hague 1962, p. 134.

²⁹ van Buitenen, *Maitrāyaṇīya Upaniṣad*, p. 109. This is a repeated passage from the Praśna Up. 1.8,

Latent in this text is that the lower Brahman is *viśvarūpa* too. The Brahman of Light abides as Ātman in the hearts of creatures. The identification between the two, Ātman and Brahman, can be recognized when the adept practices the Agnihotra ritual mentally instead of physically. With the internalization of the ritual fire offering, the adept recognizes that the fire in his own heart is none other than his soul which is identical to the Supreme Soul, or Brahman. An explicit homology of macro- and microcosm, an homology actualized by a mental sacrifice is what this text affirms. The sameness assures that on the microcosmic level, Ātman too must be of a *viśvarūpa* nature. In keeping with the homology, the text does not predicate primacy to the "higher" Brahman; instead it inclines towards an "undecided dualism".³⁰ Distinctions are based on the unenmeshed position of the "higher" Brahman and the enveloped position of the "lower" Brahman, or Ātman. This ambivalency emerges as a characteristic of the Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad as it grapples not only with the nature of Brahman but also with the relation of the god Rudra-Śiva to the higher or lower aspect of Brahman.

wherein the verse is dedicated to the glory of the sun, understood as the cosmic soul, Ātman. J. Bousquet, "Praśna Upaniṣad" in *Les Upaniṣad*, texte et traduction sous la direction de Louis Renou, Paris, 1978; pp. 7 and 12.

³⁰ van Buitenen, *Maitrāyaṇīya Upaniṣad*, p. 71.

CHAPTER NINE

BODY OF GOD IN THE ŚVETĀŚVATARA UPANIṢAD

The seminal role of the Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad (ŚU) in the development of *śaivite* theism occurs between the opening questions

What is the Cause? Is it Brahman?

Wherefrom are we borne? Why do we live? On what are we established? (ŚU 1.1)

and the closing answers

Him who is the supreme Maheśvara of lords, the supreme deity of deities (ŚU 6.7ab)

He is the Cause, the lord of the lords of sense-organs

Of him there is neither progenitor, nor lord (ŚU 6.9cd).

Immediately after posing the initial questions on the First Cause of things, notice is given that theism will prevail over materialistic, anthropomorphic or semi-abstract Causes proffered by other schools. Over all such Causes rules the atman-power (*ātma-śakti*) of one god (*deva*).¹

But there is more than one conception of the one god. A number of contrasting views are given on the nature of the one god. That god is Rudra-Śiva. The steady ascension of this minor god throughout the Saṃhitās now climaxes. In this Upaniṣad he is *the* One, unbegotten, unexcelled, and capable of bestowing liberation upon his worshippers. In the process of rising to preeminence, Rudra-Śiva has retained the creative powers ascribed to him in the Saṃhitās and especially the all-encompassing creative capacity attributed to him from the Śatarudrīya litany onwards. For this reason and due to the fact that this Upaniṣad reflects different speculative viewpoints, the Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad offers a variety of divine images of Rudra-Śiva. These religious images are associated, fully or partially, with the three Vedic definitions of the multiplicity convention isolated at the outset of this work, and, they anticipate the typology of early *śaiva* icons.

The differing viewpoints indicate a variety of opinions on the position of the personal deity. God can be identified with the Supreme in the monistic theology of the Vedāntins. God can also be added onto a sort of dualism that becomes characteristic of the Sāṃkhya system. In the latter case, god is part of a triune Absolute (Brahman), composed of god, soul and nature. This concept of a triple Brahman seems to be a compromise between monism and dualism initiated first in this Upaniṣad.²

¹ Cf. ŚU 1.2–3.

² A. Silburn, "Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad" in *Les Upanishad*, texte et traduction sous la direction de Louis Renou, Paris, 1978, p. 11.

“This which is praised is the Highest Brahman (*paramam brahma*), and in it there is a triad”.³ One composition of the triad is given in 1.9:

There are two unborn ones, the knowing one and the unknowing one, the ruler and the ruled;

Unborn is also She who is connected with enjoyer and the object of enjoyment.

Atman is eternal, omniform (*viśvarūpa*) and passive

When one discovers the triad, that is Brahman.

In this verse, the three eternal principles comprising the triune nature of Brahman are Nature [the female, later to be known as Prakṛti], the soul [Ātman] and the knowing One (also *īśa*, the ruler who supports all, including the soul; cf. 1.8). God, called Hara in the following verse (ŚU 1.10), rules over both the Soul and Nature. Hara comes to be an epithet of Śiva and it appears to occur first in this context. Realization of the identity of the individual soul with God can be achieved with the knowledge of the distinction between Ātman (also called the enjoyer, see ŚU 1.8 and 9), and the object of enjoyment (namely the world, or Nature).⁴ Whereas the more ancient Upaniṣads established an identity between the psychical Self (i.e. *ātman*) and the Cosmic Self (i.e. *brahman*), this Upaniṣad is identifying the psychical Self with God (Īśa, Hara), the cosmic Activator or Impellor of ŚU 1.12. It is as if an identification between individual psychic energy and the energy of the supreme Impellor were being declared. The nature of the Ātman is *viśvarūpa*. If for no other reason than that Ātman is identified with God, He too must be *viśvarūpa*.

The triune essence of Brahman is also described in ŚU 1.12 and 13. But here the interrelation between the same three components is somewhat different.

Having recognized the enjoyer, the object of enjoyment and the Impellor, all has been said. That is the threefold Brahman. (1.12 cd.)

It is fair to say that there is scholarly agreement on the identification of two of the three components. The enjoyer is Ātman, the individual soul. Nature is the object that is enjoyed by the Ātman.⁵ Interpretations vary on the identification of the Activator or Impellor, understood by some as the Cosmic Soul, the Brahman, but as God by most scholars, including myself.⁶ Right after this teaching on the threefold Brahman there follows an extended metaphor to illustrate belief in a threefold unity which unfolds into separate elements. That is, the configuration in ŚU 1.13 is a linear configuration, with evolution stemming from one source, whereas the former configuration in 1.9 posits three separate entities, with one above the two others:

³ ŚU 1.7.

⁴ Cf. Silburn, “Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad”, p. 11.

⁵ See A.B. Keith, *Religion and Philosophy of the Vedas and Upanishads* II, 2nd Indian Reprint; Delhi 1976 p. 549. Silburn, “Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad”, p. 56. F. Edgerton, *The Beginnings of Indian Philosophy*, Cambridge, 1965. M. Müller, *The Upaniṣads* Pt. II in *Sacred Books of the East (SBE)*, Vol. 15, 1884; p. 236, fn. 4.

⁶ M. Müller, *SBE* 15, p. 236; Brahman as god, or *īśvara*. Keith, *Religion and Philosophy*, p. 549; Silburn, “Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad”, p. 56.

As the material form (*mūrti*) of fire when hidden in [its] source (*yonī*) is not seen, though there is no disappearance of [its] subtle form (*linga*),
 Even it can be grasped at the source (*yonī*) by the kindling stick, so both [i.e. the Higher and Lower forms] (can be grasped) in the body by means of the syllable *Om*.

Ostensibly the subject of 1.13 is on the appearance of earthly fire latent in its source and therefore not perceivable although not vanished; this exposition is however an extended metaphor on the apprehension and arising of god (*deva*) within oneself. As 1.14 says:

Making one's own body the [lower] kindling stick, and the syllable *Om* the upper kindling stick
 From rubbing [these two] together which is like a meditation
 One may see god [who is] hidden, as it were.

The body can be considered the source wherefrom realization and apprehension of the divine can occur; through the practice of yogic meditation the hidden form of god can be found within the self. The teaching is that something imperceivable is not necessarily absent. That from which a material form can spring (i.e. the subtle form) continues to exist. Be it fire or god, both are latent in their respective sources. Fire can materialize by kindling, god can be visualized through the practice of yogic meditation and the repetition of the syllable *Om*.

The metaphor has more to offer than insight into the presence of god hidden within the material body. The choice of terms has other far-reaching implications. The teaching begins with the material form, the body or *mūrti* and ends with *yonī* because that source is the locus of the godhead. The upward progression explains how the physical form is the basic instrument by which attainment of god can be achieved. The order of the terms when reversed also contains a message; then they imply the downward progression taken by a threefold divinity as it moves from transcendental to materiality. The progression begins with *yonī*, the source, and ends with *mūrti*, material form. The possibility for a downward progression is already broached in the earlier upaniṣadic literature. The same or related terminology and its usage in a hierarchy of divine unfolding have been noticed in the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad*. The term *yonī* can hardly be read without recalling that in BAU I.4.11, Brahman is the *yonī* (the womb, or source), and that this reference itself draws upon a tradition which designates as *yonī* that place or power which initiates cosmic creation.⁷ The same Upaniṣad in section II.3 refers to a form of Brahman other than, and therefore different from, the transcendental source; it is called *mūrta*, a term related to *mūrti* in that both are derivatives of the same verbal root \sqrt{murch} , $\sqrt{mūr}$. *Mūrta* could easily be translated as "the created, solid form" because it is so clearly juxtaposed in that section with the form designated as *a-mūrta*.⁸ *Mūrti* in the above metaphor of the ŚU keeps to this general meaning when rendered as "material form". It is however here used as the third form in an unfolding sequence whereas in BAU II.3 *mūrta* designates "the lower Brahman" [the first embodiment of the Higher (*amūrta*) Brahman]

⁷ See Chapter 8, p. 87.

⁸ See Chapter 8, p. 92.

and not a third form. In the ŚU metaphor, *linga* is the term interjected between *yonī* and *mūrti*. It is first used here to denote “sign” [pointing to the presence of something ulterior or transcendental.] It can be translated as “subtle form” since *linga* is something between the transcendental and the material. Perhaps “subtle prototype of the gross body”⁹ best explains the meaning of the term *linga* in the metaphor. Now, the far-reaching implication of these three terms is that they coordinate with the opening doctrine of this Upaniṣad, namely that Brahman, or the Supreme, is a threefold Power. The terms also demonstrate the continued appeal and importance of biological symbolism in conveying the process of emission to explain divine unfolding and cosmic creation. The downward progression marking the unfolding of divinity is essentially the emission of lower embodiments or creations from a higher source. Lastly, from the vantage point of later art, especially *śaiva* art, the terms in ŚU I.13 relate particularly well to *śaiva* iconography. Actually, it is not altogether necessary to wait until the advent of *śaiva* art to make a connection between the images of Rudra-Śiva and the conceptualizations suggested in this metaphor. The Upaniṣad itself does it: II.16 allows that the One God is born from the womb (*garbha*); IV.21 mentions the dakṣiṇa mukha of Rudra; III.5 speaks of Rudra’s śiva form. Outlines of future imagery proclaiming the actualization of God from the Highest, the arising of God’s mukha(s), and the manifestation of God’s auspicious, worshipful, material form are recognizably sketched in these descriptions, as will be more fully explained below.

The opening discourse in the Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad emphasizes the triune nature of Brahman and prepares thereby the ground for the different notions about god in various ideologies that follow. A type of monism which includes theism is implied in ŚU I.12–14, and it is sustained in II.16. Here God is considered to be the Activator, the effective Cause or Impellor who creates the world. He seems to be the power to stimulate the source towards the act of creation. The Upaniṣad advances devotionism or *bhakti* for this God, who can also be regarded as the Supreme in this text. Lastly the adjustment of god, as the Ruler, over two independent and eternal elements, Nature and Soul, prefigures the dualism of Sāṃkhya with the addition of a personal god superior to both.

Acceptance of the triune nature of Brahman is prepared by Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad I.4.1–7 (see Chapter 8); herein the existence of a threefold cosmogonic unfolding is explored. A direct influence or correspondence between the several compositions of the triune nature of the Supreme in these two treatises is not implied. For one, it is not quite clear to me how much direct influence and exchange of ideas can be expected to have existed between the followers of different Vedic śākhās. What seems likely is that a general belief in the tripartite Supreme and the three stages of unfolding formulated in the earlier Upaniṣad probably had considerable currency by the time of the Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad. The Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad modifies this vision to its particular theistic outlook. The modification, as we shall see, involves a triadic Supreme who unfolds into the subtle and then material forms of the personal god Rudra-Śiva. For continuities and overlapping tendencies to exist between a theistic and rather late Upaniṣad and an early Upaniṣad expressing monism is not so unusual, since the Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad reflects

⁹ Stella Kramrisch, *The Presence of Śiva*, Princeton, 1981, p. 167.

more the bhakti sentiments arising within the Vedic tradition than a sectarian spirit alienated from it.¹⁰

The Śvetāśvatara recognizes the transcendental Womb as a unitary Plenum which is beyond distinctions and formulations. The Womb as eternal Plenum is of course a way of grasping the fullness of Brahman in the earlier texts (e.g. BAU I.4.11–15); it is an analogy not lost sight of in the Śvetāśvatara. The idea of the Womb as source of divine creation, suggested in the ŚU metaphor cited above, appears elsewhere in this text. From ŚU II.16, it must be concluded that the Womb is the higher source of the supreme god:

That god who faces over all directions, he is the first born and [he moves?]¹¹ within the womb

He was born and he will be born; he stands facing creatures, having a head in every direction.

The fullness of the womb that is Brahman is best alluded to in ŚU IV.9–10 where it is said that Maheśvara, the māyin (“illusion-maker”) projects the whole world out of “This”, namely Brahman. Thus, god, called Maheśvara, arises from the Plenum (the Brahman-womb) from which all else is emitted. BAU II.3.1 lays the theoretical groundwork in declaring that there exists a Higher Brahman (i.e. the *amūrta* Brahman) and a lower Brahman which is Its embodied, individualized form. BAU I.4.1 explores the same concept more concretely. The first creation of the impersonal Ātman-Puruṣa is individuality, or, the “Ātman-Puruṣa called I”. In both the BAU cases, the created form results from an act of autogenesis or self-embodiment undertaken by the Plenum. In the Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad, the Plenum can be designated as Para Brahman, that is Higher Brahman (ŚU 1.7). Unlike *amūrta* a term contrasting the non-substantive nature of the Absolute with the substantive (i.e. *mūrta* nature of its emissions), *para* is a designation which gives pre-eminence to the superior position of the Absolute vis-à-vis its lower emissions. In the main however, there is a dearth of descriptive expressions relating to the Absolute. The Supreme, as Womb or Para Brahman simply “is”. The designation “This” (*etat*, the neuter of the demonstrative pronoun) in ŚU V.6, VI.17 and 4.9 (above) alludes to the indescribable nature of the Para Brahman. Its otherness is also emphasized when it is said to be *arūpa* (without form, ŚU III.10), “That which is higher than this world” (cf. III.10) and *anāmayam* (without suffering; lit. “free from disease” ŚU III.10). The last condition is suggestive of the bliss of Brahman. The several privatives in ŚU III.10 indicate that this Upaniṣad, as the other major Upaniṣads, did not develop a language for describing the Ultimate in positive terms. Indeed references to Brahman abound in the negation of positive attributes. Thus ŚU VI.9 speaks of the Highest Brahman as *alīnga* (“without a sign pointing to an ulterior source”, VI.9) and VI.19 knows Him as *niṣkala* (without form, undifferentiated), *niṣkriya* (actionless), *śānta* (tranquil, i.e. blissful), *niravadya* (irreproachable) and *nirañjana* (spotless, in the sense of pure). These attributes which try to put into words

¹⁰ Cf. R.G. Bhandarkar, *Vaiṣṇavism Śaivism and Minor Religious Systems*. Reprint, Delhi, 1965, pp. 106–111; Cf. Keith, *Religion and Philosophy* II, p. 549.

¹¹ Cf. VS 31.19, Chapter 4, p. 42.

the nature of something inexorably beyond the senses are in this instance referring to God. The Sixth Adhyāya of this Upaniṣad places the personal God on par with the Highest Brahman. ŚU VI.17 sets forth this position in the first two lines: "He, identical with That [note the use of the neuter demonstrative pronoun *taṁ*], immortal, appearing as Īśa, the Knowing One,¹² omnipresent, the protector of the world."¹³ As such, it must be borne in mind that *alinga*, *niṣkala* etc. are being ascribed to Para Brahman identified with Para Rudra-Śiva, as it were. The ambivalent attitude regarding this identification ought to be demonstrated right away by citing another verse where just the opposite seems to be maintained. Verse III.7 comes after a series of images establishing the awesome glory of Rudra-Śiva (in ŚU III.1–6). Then pada III.7a intones: *tataḥ param brahmaṇam* "Beyond this¹⁴ is Para Brahman." In sum, the theistic tendencies in this Upaniṣad can provoke a vacillation on the question of the Higher Reality. Is it Brahman? Is it God? Are the two identical? But the particular theory ascribing a triune nature to the Highest, or the description of the second and third components forming the triad do not seem subject to similar vacillations.

The body of God marking the second component is huge and omniformed. God is a Large Person. He is large because he inherits the fullness of his Source. Rudra-Śiva is the embodiment of the Higher Reality. He, just like the "Fullness Here" (BAU 5.1.1) retains the original plentitude. When the original plentitude assumes shape, it has a body and that body is of a Huge Male, named Rudra-Śiva. God, said to be the first born from the full Womb, is the crystalization, as it were, of the transcendental Plenum. In many different ways throughout the Upaniṣad, the fullness of God is evoked. The reason is because Rudra-Śiva is the Cosmic Male as personal godhead.

The image of Puruṣa-Prajāpati is alive in Rudra-Śiva. Right after the god of the Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad is first identified as Rudra (in ŚU III.2) there follows this description of him: "Having an eye on every side, and a face on every side, having an arm on every side and having a foot on every side, the One God forges together with both hands and with wings producing heaven and earth." (ŚU III.3). The vivid image of the omniform creator certainly reminds of the opening description of the Cosmic Puruṣa with his countless heads, eyes and feet. In fact ŚU III.3 is a repetition from the Rig Veda, but from RV 10.81.3 a verse describing Viśvakarman. Its usage in the Upaniṣad is apt for several reasons. Both Viśvakarman and Rudra are agents of creation, cosmic creators. Both are personal gods, although Viśvakarman does not have many personal attributes; just the same, the epithet *eka deva* used in the Rig Vedic verse is most suitable in this Upaniṣadic context where not infrequently *eka deva* describes Rudra-Śiva. Viśvakarman possesses a fruitful womb; it contains all creatures that he creates.¹⁵ Rudra dwells within the Primordial Womb of the Absolute. Apparently he retains the fullness of the womb as the very

¹² Cf. ŚU 1.9 *supra*.

¹³ *sa tanmayo hyamṛta īśaśamsthō jñāh sarvago bhuwanasyāśya gopta*.

¹⁴ R.E. Hume, *The Thirteen Principal Upanishads*, 2nd edition, 1931, p. 400; fn. 5; Either "higher than this [Terrible, Vedic God Rudra]", or "higher than this [world]".

¹⁵ Chapter 2, p. 25.

next verse (ŚU III.4a), declares that Rudra “is both the source and the origin of the gods”. In the Rig Veda, it was found that verse 10.81.3 attributes multiple bodily parts to Viśvakarman in his capacity as a creator god who brings forth creation from out of himself.¹⁶ This usage of the multiplicity convention illustrates the first definition of the convention that I am able to isolate in the Rig Veda. Definition 1 maintains that multiple bodily parts and forms are associated with a deity who creates, by means of emission, the phenomenal world. The context in which the repeated verse appears in this Upaniṣad suits Definition 1. The preceeding verse (ŚU III.2d), calls attention to Rudra, the Protector, who has created all creatures. The succeeding verse (ŚU III.4) informs that formerly Rudra gave birth to the world-stuff (i.e. Hiraṇyagarbha; lit. the golden womb), and originated the gods (*supra*). Thus the Rig Vedic repetition with its multiplicity image is bracketed by notions that endorse Definition 1. This, together with the fact that the terminology of RV 10.81.3 coordinates smoothly with the rest of the Upaniṣad, make it probable that the choice of the repetition in the particular context was a careful selection, and that the meaning of the multiplicity convention as set forth in Definition 1 may still be operative in the Upaniṣad. The same third Chapter of this Upaniṣad also repeats the multiplicity imagery which pertains to the Cosmic Male, Puruṣa in the Puruṣasūkta. ŚU III.14 repeats RV 10.90.1 the oldest and perhaps most influential image of the omniform creator: “Puruṣa has a thousands heads, a thousand eyes, a thousand feet”, and, ŚU III.15, a repetition of RV 10.90.2, confirms the homologization of Puruṣa and the world of the past, present and future. The selection of these two verses at this point in the Upaniṣad appear to be equally deliberate. The ground leading up to III.14 has been sufficiently prepared so that the omniform Puruṣa must perforce be Lord Rudra. ŚU III.8, for example, makes it clear that Rudra is the huge Puruṣa:

I know that Person (*puruṣa*), the large one,
 Suncolored, beyond darkness.
 Knowing him alone one goes beyond death
 There is no other path to go.¹⁷

The knowledge, namely that Rudra, the Controller of the whole world (as ŚU III.18 calls him) is cast in the image of the Cosmic Male, is again repeated. ŚU III.19d acknowledges that “Men invoke him as the large Person” (*puruṣam mahāntam*). It cannot come as a surprise that the body of Lord Rudra assumes the outline of the huge multiform shape characteristic of Mahā Puruṣa. Rudra is already structurally outfitted in the guise of Puruṣa in the Kauṣītaka Brāhmaṇa legend;¹⁸ the truth of that image is declared in the Śatarudrīya litany, an ode of homage to Viśvarūpa Rudra in both the White and Black Yajur Vedas;¹⁹ and the reality of this mystery is demonstrated to humans with each performance of an

¹⁶ See Chapter 2, p. 25.

¹⁷ J.A.B. van Buitenen, “The Large Ātman”, *History of Religions* 4.1, 1964, 106; *vedāham etaṁ puruṣam mahāntam ādityavarṇam tamasaḥ parastāt tam eva viditvāti mṛtyum eti nānyaḥ panthā vidyate yanāya*.

¹⁸ See Chapter 7, pp. 76–77.

¹⁹ See Chapter 4, p. 44.

Agnicayana sacrifice.²⁰ The omniform image of Rigvedic Puruṣa belongs now to Rudra. The transference, legitimized by devotional fervour, is achieved by the gradual accretion of portentous attributes. It is of course highly interesting that RV 10.90.1, a verse exemplifying my second definition of the multiplicity convention in the Rig Veda, reoccurs here. That definition associates multiple bodily parts and forms with a deity who represents, or is the same as, the material out of which the phenomenal world is fashioned. In the Rig Vedic illustrations of Definition 2, the emphasis is on an androgynous divinity, pregnant with the forms of the world, but passive in their deliverance since others are engaged in bringing forth the forms.²¹ In this Upaniṣad, Rudra too is both man and woman (cf. ŚU IV.3)²² and the source wherefrom all creatures are born (cf. IV.4), but he is not passive in the birth giving process. ŚU VI.16ab comments on all these points: "He is the maker of all, he knows all, the self-sourced (or, self-caused, *ātmayonir*),²³ the knowing one". Rudra retains thus several of the features contained in Definition 2, but not passivity. God as the first embodiment of the transcendental is an active agent. The active role of Rudra in furthering creation is quite consistently expressed. He is "the Impellor" it will be remembered (ŚU I.12, *supra*), and, the *māyin* who projects the whole world out of the Brahman-womb (ŚU IV.10). The latter description illustrates well how far Rudra is distanced from an otiose deity. For it is precisely gods possessing *māya* who brought out the forms located in a passive Rig Vedic deity.²⁴ The aspects of Definitions 1 and 2 that apply to Lord Rudra deal with his being a deity who is filled or pregnant with all life-forms that constitute the phenomenal world. Add to these aspects that Rudra inherits much of the physical outlines of Puruṣa-Prajāpati and there results the visualization of the Lord as a Huge Male. His hugeness can refer to the more ancient mythopoeic imagery of the Pregnant Male. Indeed some of the terminology employed in the Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad leaves little doubt that Rudra emits creation (*√srj* ŚU IV.9; *√samrj* III.2), or gives birth to creatures (*√jan* IV.4) from out of himself. Thus his omniform or *viśvarūpa* quality in this Upaniṣad is suggestive of his pregnant state.

A later *śaivite* Upaniṣad also attributes the *viśvarūpa* state to Rudra. In the Atharvaśiras, Rudra is omniform. The visualization relates to the omniform model formulated in the Puruṣasūkta. "With a thousand feet and only one head, he pervades the world and makes it roll".²⁵ The largeness of Rudra, exalted as Maheśvara, likewise recalls the cosmic dimensions of the ancient Puruṣa: "His (i.e. Rudra's) head is to the North, his feet to the South . . . he all-pervading, as all-pervading he is infinite . . . he is pure . . . subtle . . .

²⁰ It will be remembered that the Śatarudrīya Litany is chanted at the completion of the building of the fire altar, which symbolizes the huge cosmic body of Puruṣa-Prajāpati. See Chapter 7, pp. 79–80; Cf. Chapter 6.

²¹ See Chapter 2, pp. 25–26.

²² For a discussion on the ardhanaṛī implications in this and other Vedic descriptions, see Chapter 5, pp. 57–59.

²³ This compound and its implication for the androgynous nature of Rudra, has been discussed in Chapter 5, p. 57.

²⁴ See RV 3.38.4, discussed in Chapter 2, p. 25.

²⁵ See Paul Deussen, *Sixty Upanisads of the Veda II*, transl. by V.M. Bedekar and G.B. Palsule, 1st Delhi edition; 1980, p. 777.

lightning-like, the Highest Brahman, the One . . . Rudra, as Rudra he is the ruler, as the ruler he is the exalted Maheśvara".²⁶ This description combines, in a most interesting fashion, the gigantic feature from the ancient Puruṣa image together with notions on the subtle, unsolid (and therefore non-corporeal) nature of Viśvarūpa. In anticipation of what is to follow, it should not go unnoticed that this huge, unsolid (i.e. lightning-like),²⁷ exalted divine aspect is called Maheśvara. The Kaivalya Upaniṣad (7) describes the Supreme Lord Rudra, who is to be meditated upon, as having a "dark neck, three-eyes, wholly calm, all seeing".²⁸ He is "thousand eyed" according to the Nilarudra Upaniṣad (2.11).²⁹

But the upaniṣads can go beyond the multiplicity convention and beyond biological symbolism to express creative potential. Other vocabulary has been developed of which the most succinct and eloquent probably is "the fullness" formulated in the Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad. The huge body of Rudra can be spacially large to represent the fullness he inherits from the transcendental (be it the Brahman-Womb, or, Para Brahman, or, Para Rudra-Śiva as it were).

The huge spacial dimension encompassed by the first embodiment of the transcendental is connoted by means of rather precise language. In fact, when ŚU III.8 states "I know that *puruṣam mahāntam*", it is using the language that refers to the spacial amplitude of the first born agent of creation. In the older and some of the younger upaniṣads, usage of *mahān/mahat* as a qualifier of beings such as *ātman*, *puruṣa*, *yakṣa* and *prathamaja* refers to the completeness that defines the original creator.³⁰ *Mahān/Mahat*, as also *pūrṇa*, *bahu*, *bhūman* etc. refer to a largeness that is almost conceived of as an organic whole.³¹ As van Buitenen observes, such a creator is manifest and complete and "this completeness is very often stated in terms of body and limbs".³² van Buitenen finds the technical terminology in use already in the BAU; such references are in I.4.11ff. where Brahman is not fully expanded until the completion of the evolutionary process, or, in I.4.17 where the Ātman experiences incompleteness until the body forms within have been brought out.³³ I agree and would also include BAU I.4.1–7. This section contains the most concrete reference to the fullness of the agent of creation. Here the agent is the large Self in the shape of the individualized Male; the test refers to him as Ātman in the form of Puruṣa called "I" having a body as large as a woman and man in close embrace. If one had to search the Upaniṣads for antecedents to Rudra as Mahā Puruṣa, that is, god as a huge Male, filled with the forms of creation, that search can begin with this early image of the body of the creator and continue with the other references cited by van

²⁶ See Deussen, *Sixty Upaniṣads*, p. 772 in Atharvaśiras 3; in 4, each of these designations is explained with some recourse to specious etymologies.

²⁷ Note that in the Kena Upaniṣad, the apparition of the Yakṣa, another non-corporeal entity, is likewise compared to lightening. See Chapter 15, pp. 206–207.

²⁸ See Deussen, *Sixty Upaniṣads*, p. 792.

²⁹ See Deussen, *Sixty Upaniṣads*, p. 785.

³⁰ van Buitenen, "The Large Ātman", 103–105.

³¹ Cf. van Buitenen, "The Large Ātman", 104.

³² van Buitenen, "The Large Ātman", 104.

³³ van Buitenen, "The Large Ātman", 104.

Buitenen. The vast body of god is immortal but not transcendental; indeed, the force of *mahān* etc. is “the first embodiment of the transcendental.” The same embodiment is also referred to in ŚU III.12 and 19, where the precise language (*mahān prabhur vai puruṣaḥ and puruṣam mahāntam*) is noticeable.³⁴ Rudra can be designated with other epithets that, in the light of the foregoing, appear to be employed with equal precision. The epithet *mahātman*, used in ŚU IV.17 and V.3 may now be read as evocative of the same concepts inhering in Mahā Puruṣa. The appellation Maheśvara (i.e. *mahā + īśvara*) ought also to refer to that aspect of Rudra which is the huge, embodied form of the transcendental. Maheśvara is the evolute leading away from initial, unstructured completeness yet containing within his huge body, all the fullness of the former and actively bringing that fullness forth. Thus there may be at work an internal logic in the Upaniṣad when it first states that the *māyin* projects, or, brings forth the whole world out of this [Brahman], and then it refers to the *māyin* by the name of Maheśvara (see IV.9–10). Another of Rudra’s names incorporating the mahat terminology is “Great Glory” (*mahad yaśas*, see ŚU IV.19). The verse in which this appellation occurs reads like the classic description of the Large Cosmic Male:

One has not grasped him on top, crosswise, nor in the middle
There is no counterpart (*pratimā*) of him whose name is Mahat Yaśas

Mahat Yaśas clearly cannot be measured; he seems to be without a beginning or an end, much like the Liṅgodbhava concept of future ages. The description is of a colossus, corroborated by the usage of mahat, which likewise imparts the connotation of hugeness in size. The colossus is probably not a gross material colossal body since it said that there is no *pratimā* of Mahat Yaśas.

Nowadays the term *pratimā* is used almost synonymously with *mūrti* by scholars to designate an image in Indian art.³⁵ At the time of the Upaniṣad, somewhat prior to the earliest divine representations, we can get a fairly good idea of the significance of the term from its usage in Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa VI.1.1.5.³⁶ In this passage Prajāpati says that the sacrifice is his *pratimā*. From this occurrence, I understand that *pratimā* is a counterpart (lit. “something measured against something else”) and, further, that it is a tangible counterpart. From this basal meaning, it is not difficult to see how *pratimā* could develop the meaning “tangible (in the sense of ‘material’) likeness”, such as an image or icon. Presumably therefore when the Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad states that there is no *pratimā* of Mahat Yaśas, it means that there is no tangible likeness, or gross material form, of the god named Mahat Yaśas.

How are we to imagine, then, a colossus devoid of material form? Remembering that the Mahat body (be it Mahat Yaśas, Mahā Puruṣa, Mahātman, Maheśvara etc.) appears to be the first evolute of the transcendental, we may assign to it a subtle, unsolid form, much like *liṅga* succeeding *yoni* and preceeding *mūrti* in the metaphor given in ŚU I.13. But it may be countered, that in the BAU citations on *amūrta* and *mūrta* Brahman, the

³⁴ Cf. van Buitenen, “The Large Ātman”, 106.

³⁵ For details see reference cited in Chapter 1, fn. 32.

³⁶ Cf. Chapter 6, p. 65.

evolute of the transcendental is a solid entity. To which it can be answered that the Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad, as previously noted, emphasizes the triune nature of the Supreme. To wit, the material form of the Supreme is associated with the third entity but not necessarily the second. It is not inappropriate to keep in mind the sequence – yoni/līṅga/mūrti – established in the metaphor on the apprehension of god. It is also helpful to note that there exists another Mahā Personage who exemplifies the notion of a divine colossus devoid of substantive form. A Mahā Yakṣa is a “body of subtle form”. In some of the same older and younger upaniṣads as those cited above, plus the Mahābhārata, a Large Yakṣa is an immanent but immaterial divine being.³⁷

If the first embodiment of the transcendental can be a large (i.e. *mahat/mahān* etc.), subtle body of god, then the subsequent body can be recognized for its distinctly different aspect. The third aspect is the concrete body of god. In the Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad, it is called the “śivā tanū”.

That body (*tanū*) of yours O Rudra which is auspicious (*śivā*),
Not terrifying (*aghora*), looking not evil (*apāpakāśinī*),
With that most beneficent body
Appear [before] us O Dweller in the mountains.³⁸

The force of *tanū* in ŚU III.5 is “divine corporeal manifestation”,³⁹ although it need not always be so used.⁴⁰ This meaning for *tanū* which emphasizes “a manifestation of the divine in the form of a visible body” can be traced back to the Saṃhitās. Both the Atharva Veda and the Black Yajur Veda choose *tanū* to refer to god’s corporeal manifestation. Moreover, usages of *tanū* in both of these earlier contexts have been previously discussed as examples showing the endurance of the third definition of the multiplicity convention.⁴¹ That is, *tanū* occurs in the Atharva Veda and the Yajur Veda not only with the connotation of “divine corporeal manifestation” but with the added notion that the manifestation is a projection out of a higher divine form; Definition 3, it will be remembered, concerns the deity who emits visible, earthly form(s) from its numinous form and on that account may be ascribed multiple bodily parts and forms. It is proposed that *śivā tanū* is used in verse ŚU III.5 with these connotations. As such, the subject of the verse is a visible corporeal manifestation which Rudra has (or is able to) emit upon the earth.

A sequence going from the subtle body to the corporeal body of god is implicit, though not explicit, in the text. First, the teaching of the triune nature of the Supreme, and the specific relationship of the three aspects leading to an apprehension of god (yoni/līṅga/mūrti), already suggest that the second aspect is subtle and the third is material and that there is an evolutionary progression between them. Parenthetically it should be noted

³⁷ See complete discussion in Chapter 15.

³⁸ ŚU III.5; *yā te rudra śivā tanūraghorā ‘pāpakāśinī/tayā nastanuṁ santamayā giriśantābhicākaśiḥ //*

³⁹ See Jan Gonda, *Viṣṇuism and Śivaism*, London, 1970, p. 44; H. Oldenberg, *Vorwissenschaftliche Wissenschaft*, Göttingen, 1919, pp. 100ff.

⁴⁰ See Chapter 3; fn. 20 for the analysis of this term.

⁴¹ See AVŚ 13.4.44, in Chapter 3; see TS 2.4.2 in Chapter 4.

that what is suggested in the Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad attains more concrete formulation in the Mahānārāyaṇa Upaniṣad (see Chapter 10). Second, ŚU IV.14 implies some kind of distinction between the creator of everything, who is multiformed (*anekarūpam*), more subtle than subtle (*sūkṣmātisūkṣmam*), and, he who can be apprehended (*√jñā*) as *śiva* (benevolent, auspicious etc.) There is, on the one hand, the multiformed, subtle body of the creator, and, on the other hand, he who can be known (or perceived) as *śiva*, an apprehension which promotes peace. The juxtaposition of these two aspects of god denies an identity between the *śiva* form and the subtle multi-form. There is sufficient evidence in the text itself (see above) to indicate that the multiformed body of god belongs to the huge second component of the triune Supreme, or, we may say the first embodiment of the transcendental. It therefore seems that ŚU IV.14 is differentiating between the large omniform body of god, too subtle to be perceived by a devotee and the perceivable, corporeal body emanated from the subtle form ostensibly for the purpose of bringing peace to god's worshippers. This is the *śivā tanū*, and the theological context that surrounds it seems to imply the continued validity of Definition 3 for the meaning of the multiplicity convention.

What are the properties of a *śivā tanū*? It probably is not omniform since that condition is associated with the form juxtaposed with the *śivā tanū*. The third body is defined as *śiva*, *aghora* and *apāpakāśinī* (ŚU III.5). What these qualifiers have in common is their distance from the horrific. Indeed, the form is most beneficent, and must thereby be the very antithesis of a fear-inducing form. It is not only a perceivable body but it is also a body that man *desires* to see. If it is correct that this *śiva* body is different from the *mahat* form from which it has apparently sprung, than the latter ought to be an awesome, disquieting and not a readily perceivable body (which would be the case with the subtle body). I should call attention to the fact that throughout this investigation, *śiva* has been analyzed as a term qualifying god and not as the name of god; that is the way the ŚU uses the term (cf. III.5; IV.14, 16). Throughout the Brāhmaṇas and not until the later upaniṣadic tradition, does *śiva* occur as a name for Rudra. The name "Śiva" does not, for example, occur in the lists of names for Rudra found in the Kauṣītaki Brāhmaṇa (6.1–9), or the Maitrāyaṇīya Upaniṣad (6.8). The term is an adjective qualifying Rudra and only knowledge of the term's subsequent importance permits the hyphenation "Rudra-Śiva" as a way of referring to the Vedic antecedents of the Hindu god Śiva. The Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad, and especially ŚU III.5, imparts the idea that the *śiva* form of Rudra is a visible, beneficent manifestation of god that his worshippers desire to behold, and that this body is different from a subtle body, which probably gives rise to the *śivā tanū*.

The ideas expressed in ŚU III.5 do not originate with the authors of the Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad. ŚU III.5 is repeated from the Śatarudrīya Litany and can be found in Taittirīya Saṃhitā 4.5.1c and Vājasaneyi Saṃhitā 16.2. Therefore it is legitimate to question whether the ideas on the nature of the *śivā tanū* properly stem from the Upaniṣad or whether they pre-date it. Could the ideas originate from the Yajur Veda which already formulated the verse? Some ramifications of the above observations could have developed earlier. The Litany clearly distinguishes between two very different "bodies" of Rudra. The "śiva"

body in the context of the Śatarudrīya Litany is distinguished from the “wrathfull” body. These two bodies bespeak of the awesome, the ambivalent, the all-encompassing nature of the supreme creator. However, the Yajur Veda does not show evidence of a teaching on the triune nature of god, nor on the progressive unfolding of this triune nature. Although these teachings are in their infancy in the Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad and are not yet stabilized, still they are present. For this reason, it would be premature to attribute the same significance to verse ŚU III.5 in the Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad as in the Yajur Veda. Especially the significance the *śivā tanū* has in the Upaniṣad (a significance assisted by other verses in the Upaniṣad), cannot be assigned in the earlier occurrences.

The Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad does not indicate whether the “*śivā tanū*” is endowed with multiple bodily parts and/or forms. Neither the “*śivā tanū*” nor the other possible pleasing form of Rudra (the “*dakṣiṇa mukha*”, see below), is described in sufficient detail. In this respect the Upaniṣad does not differ from other *śaiva* Upaniṣads. In the Atharvaśiras, the term *śiva* does not appear; epithets such as Īśāna, Bhagavān and Maheśvara do appear. In the Nilarudra Upaniṣad, the name “Śiva” does occur. Śiva is given salutations and described as “black-necked”.⁴² There are no multiplicity references associated with him. The Kaivalya Upaniṣad identifies God as Brahman, Śiva, Indra, Akṣara . . . Viṣṇu, Prāṇa etc., but no multiplicity references are supplied for any of these deities. The Mahānārāyaṇa Upaniṣad mentions a “*śivaliṅga*”, which, as will be discussed in Chapter 10, could denote “an auspicious liṅga”. Thus the multiplicity references to the *śaiva* god in this and all the Upaniṣads surveyed are restricted to one image, namely the omniform god which is associated with the second component and not the third. A *śivā tanū*, as far as this Upaniṣad is concerned, designates a beneficent manifestation of god.

A worshipper’s desire to see the *śaivite* beneficent body should give some pause for reflection. This desire parallels to a remarkable degree the conditions under which a *vaiṣṇava* deity reveals his gentle (i.e. *saumya*) form. The Bhagavad Gītā contains an episode wherein the god Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa reveals a *saumya* form to his devotee. The mortal cannot bear to behold for too long the *viśvarūpa* vision he is permitted to see and he longs to behold the more peaceful, gentler body of god.⁴³

There is another possible supplication in the Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad for the appearance of god’s pleasing form. In ŚU IV.21, one who is afraid asks Rudra to protect him with his *dakṣiṇa mukham*. “Mukha” signifies in the Agnicayana ritual “head (or first bodily part) when more of the body is forthcoming”.⁴⁴ “Dakṣiṇa” can be explained as “southern” or “pleasing, gracious etc.” Therefore, the *dakṣiṇa mukha* which protects in ŚU IV.21 could either be “a pleasing head” or “a head facing towards the south”. There is precious little evidence available to determine which meaning to choose except if one wishes to be guided by the later depictions of *śaivite* Mukhaliṅgas. A southern mukha invariably represents the Aghora mukha of Śiva. Being always portrayed as a terrific form of Śiva

⁴² See Deussen, *Sixty Upaniṣads*, p. 787.

⁴³ See complete discussion in Chapter 11.

⁴⁴ See Chapter 14, p. 193.

it does not, I suppose, answer the prayers of someone afraid who wishes to have divine protection. This line of reasoning would suggest that preference ought to be given to a countenance of Rudra that is pleasing, propitious etc.

This is not the only textual reference which could anticipate mukhas appearing on lingas in later art. Both ŚU II.16 and ŚU IV.3 attribute to the god “a face in every direction” (*sarvatomukha* in II.16; *viśvatomukha* in ŚU IV.3). Both verses are Vedic repetitions,⁴⁵ but their content is so closely interwoven with the mainstream of *śaivite* ideology in this and succeeding works that their adoption here could only be regarded as circumspect and deliberate. The expression “having a face in every direction” is symbolic of an omniscience, omnipotent, universal Power. It is so characteristic of Rudra-Śiva that it is the first symbol, known to date, to be given plasticity in *śaivite* art. The Bhīṭā Pañcamukha Līṅga portrays the concretized expression of *viśvatomukha/sarvatomukha*. It goes without saying that in the Indian context, “every direction” is more than the four directions.

One final observation relates to the meaning of “mukha”. The meaning of the term *mukha* I have chosen to apply is derived from the context of the Vedic Agnicayana ritual. The meaning “head or first part of the body when more of the body is forthcoming” is essentially still intact even in the medieval *śaiva āgamas*.⁴⁶ Besides the fact that this meaning is still found in later Śaivism, there is a more immediate rationale for adopting this meaning in the Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad. The Upaniṣad quotes from the Śatarudrīya Litany, which occurs in the Agnicayana ritual. Some acquaintance with the ritual itself may therefore be presumed, especially since Vedic rituals, including the Agnicayana, were still being performed around the time of the Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad.⁴⁷ Even the quite similar meaning of *mukha*, namely “first part or initial quantity of a progression” used in mathematical treatises could have also been known at this time. This meaning of *mukha* has some implications for understanding the *śivā tanū* of god. At the very least, a “head or first part of the body” belonging to god (i.e. a *mukha* of god) must proceed the *tanū* which represents an entire, and probably not a partial, divine corporeal manifestation. The Mahānārāyaṇa Upaniṣad will clarify further the *mukha* concept and its relation to the *tanū* concept. Therefore it is best to complete the analyses of these terms in the subsequent chapter.

A true indicator of the seminal aspect the Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad for the development of Śaivism is the occurrence and function of the repetitions. If a tally were made of all the passages, terminologies and concepts from earlier Vedic sources that are repeated in this text, together with the passages, terminologies and concepts that the text passes on to future works, then the degree to which this Upaniṣad is a watershed in Śaivism would become apparent. The text culls numerous Vedic tendencies and groups them around

⁴⁵ ŚU II.16 = VS 32.4; IV.3 = AV 10.8.27.

⁴⁶ The most complete discussions on the significance of Mukhalingas in the Āgamas are in D.M. Srinivasan, “Śaiva Temple Forms: loci of god’s unfolding body”, in *Investigating Indian Art*, M. Yaldiz and W. Lobo eds., Berlin, 1987; pp. 335–347; D.M. Srinivasan, “From Transcendence to Materiality: Para Śiva, Sadāśiva and Maheśa in Indian Art”, *Artibus Asiae*, Vol. L, 1/2, 1990, pp. 108–142; See also Chapter 19, pp. 271–273.

⁴⁷ See a discussion of the archaeological evidence for the performance of Vedic rituals in the early centuries around the Christian era in Chapter 14, p. 195.

the one great god, Rudra-Śiva, in a more urgent and inspiring fashion than had previously been attempted. For example, prior usages of biological symbolism, of the multiplicity convention as outlined in the three definitions, of the triune nature of the Highest, and a threefold somatology come to focus around the figure of Rudra-Śiva. Vacillations on whether the Highest is a neuter Power or a personal god is of course, not a problem first encountered here. It has dogged speculative thought from the Atharva Veda onward and is quite evident as a problem in other Upaniṣads. Terms used previously, such as *śiva*, *tanū*, *pratimā*, *mūrti*, *liṅga*, *yoni*, *mahat*, *puruṣa*, *mukha*, *viśvatomukha*, *viśvarūpa*, are now honed to express a reverential attitude toward Rudra-Śiva and to explore a divine mystery. These examples demonstrate the internal workings of the Vedic tradition as it gathers momentum to formulate a complex Hindu god. Other portents in the development of Śaivism exist. Para Brahman will remain the designation for the Highest in the *śaiva* Āgamas, but these texts will designate God as Para Śiva. Para Śiva in these works will be characterized by a series of technical terms, wherein *niṣkala* and *alīṅga* figure prominently; as such these two terms describe in both the Āgamas and the Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad, the same transcendental aspect of the Supreme. This point brings up another shared feature; the Āgamas acknowledge the triple reality of Śiva and build an entire theology around this belief. Within this general theological outlook, one name of Śiva attains special significance. It is Maheśa, or Maheśvara and designates the third “body” of the triple Śiva reality. The name as encountered in the Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad likewise designates “a body” comprising the triune essence; but in the Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad, it refers to the second component within the triune essence. Closer in time to the age of the Upaniṣad are the Bhagavad Gītā and the Mahānārāyaṇa Upaniṣad, both of which show that they originate from the same wellspring of devotionism dating to the several centuries around the Christian era. The Mahānārāyaṇa Upaniṣad frequently cites from the Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad, and, in the section which explores the greatness of Rudra, it seems to pick up where the Śvetāśvatara leaves off (see Chapter 10). The Gītā, a *vaiṣṇava* work, of course, demonstrates a different sort of relationship with the Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad. Here it is not so much the influence of one text upon the other as it is the similarity they show in dealing with some theological questions. The fact that both works declare that god has a gentle body which contrasts with his omniform body, has already been mentioned and needs to be further analyzed in Chapter 11. Incidentally, the Gītā perfects a literary device found in the Śatarudrīya Litany, namely portrayal of god’s omniform body via descriptions of both the constructive and destructive forces contained in it.

It remains to comment upon the legacy of the Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad for the future of *śaiva* art. A direct influence is not proposed. How could it be when the time differential (and I suspect, the esoteric nature of this text), would make it difficult to bring the two – text and early icons – into some direct relationship. Nonetheless, there is a legacy indicated by the correlation between the beliefs in this work and their expression in the early images. On the one side are the following ideologies: 1) the triune nature of the Supreme which can be expressed as a threefold body-of-god imagery; 2) specific ways in which god can show himself including a colossal, seemingly subtle body expressing “fullness”; 3) a partial bodily manifestation such as a “mukha” and, a beneficent corporeal body.

On the other side are these elements in early *śaiva* art: 1a) the presence of a typology representing the triune nature of god; 2a–3a) such specific concretizations as the colossus, the mukha(s), and the benign aspects of god.⁴⁸ From the perspective of later *śaiva* art, it is the singular achievement of the Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad to propose a threefold nature of god and to recognize that a śiva body, existing for god's worshippers, is juxtaposed with an awesome, subtle body of god, expressive of the fullness of god's omniform nature. These distinctions will influence the threefold *śaiva* typology, including the earthly body and subtle body of Śiva. "The mortals on earth worship the God Rudra with good rites under the name of Śiva . . ." states the Mahābhārata.⁴⁹ This worshipful attitude is already evident in the seminal Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad.

⁴⁸ I have in mind the colossal image from Rṣikeśa with its Mahā Yakṣa qualities (see Chapter 17, p. 237 and Pl. 17.10); the Mukhalingas from Bhīṭā and the Mathurā region (Chapter 17; pp. 234ff., and Pl. 14.3; Pls. 17.6–8) and an early śivā tanū such as is found on the Gudimallam Liṅga (Pl. 17.9).

⁴⁹ *The Mahābhārata*, Books II & III, transl. and ed. by J.A.B. van Buitenen, Chicago, 1975; see Book 3.221, 25, p. 662.

CHAPTER TEN

MŪRTIS AND THE MAHĀNĀRĀYAṆA UPANIṢAD

If *mahā* in the title of the Mahānārāyaṇa Upaniṣad (MNU) were still to retain a technical connotation, then this Upaniṣad should be about the glory of the Large Nārāyaṇa, first embodiment of Brahman. And it is. What the title does not reveal is that the text is also about the glory of Rudra as the first embodiment of Brahman. The Upaniṣad does not reflect vacillation between the “better” of the two, nor is it a compilation of two separate works. The text reflects more man’s desire to understand how the impersonal and transcendental is connected to the personal and manifest god; it is less concerned with man’s need to proclaim one god’s superiority over the other. Man in this context is the adept who wants to get behind the world of the seemingly Real to grasp the real Real. The quest becomes knowing the Absolute by grasping the Absolute incarnate, the personal god, be it Puruṣa-Prajāpati, Nārāyaṇa, Rudra etc. Perhaps that is why the Upaniṣad sets forth the progressions by which the divine unfolds from the Absolute.

The text appears in three recensions. The longest and main apparatus for the ensuing discussion is the Āndhra recension which contains eighty anuvākas.¹ The Draviḍa, commented upon by Bhāṭṭabhaskara and Sāyaṇa, consists of sixty-four anuvākas.² An Atharva recension in twenty-five khaṇḍas also exists. I propose to date the Āndhra recension to the period around the Christian era (c. first century A.D.) on the basis of the Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad from which the Mahānārāyaṇa quotes, and on the basis of comparing the ritual complexity of the Saṃdhyā ritual as described in the MNU and in the sūtra and śāstra literature. Grounds for deciding the date will be demonstrated towards the end of the chapter.

The Upaniṣad opens with its view on cosmogony and cosmography. Lo! There in the opening verse is the *brāhman* principle still regarded as the Womb of the universe:

In the boundless cosmic water, in the middle of the universe
On the back of the firmament, larger than the large
Prajāpati, having penetrated into [the region of] light
Moves about inside the womb.³

There is little doubt that the Womb refers to Brahman. The Upaniṣad is clearly continuing an established tradition. The last example we encountered where the beginning of things is ascribed to the outpouring of the Cosmic Womb (the Brāhman principle), is in the Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad. The wording of ŚU II.16, when referring to the primordial

¹ This recension is translated into French by Jean Varenne, *La Mahā Nārāyaṇa Upaniṣad* (hereafter MNU), Tomes I & II (Tome II includes *La Prāṇāgnihotra Upaniṣad*), 2nd ed. Paris, 1986.

² It is translated by Paul Deussen in *Sixty Upaniṣads of the Vedas I*, pp. 247–268.

³ *ambhasy apāre bhuvanasya madhye nākasya pṛṣṭhe mahato mahīyān śukreṇa jyotīṃsi sama nupraviṣṭaḥ prajāpatīś carati garbhe antaḥ.*

womb which contains a form of Rudra, is quite similar to the MNU verse. The first part of the MNU verse is exactly the same as AV 10.8.13a. In this hymn of the Atharva Veda, Skambha is the womb and already at this time Skambha is identified with *brāhman*.⁴ MNU verses 27 and 28⁵ again mention the Womb and they appear to give further elaborations. "Prajāpati moves inside the womb, unborn he comes into existence manifoldly" (27). Actually, these verses are repetitions from the Yajur Veda (i.e. VS 31.19 = TĀ 3.13.3). But they underscore the premise in the opening verse: In the beginning exists the transcendental principle as vital energy, metaphorically considered as the quickening womb. The embodiment of this creative energy rests inside. It is Prajāpati. Since he comes into existence "manifoldly", it can only be surmised that in this Upaniṣad as in the Śvetāśvatara and older Upaniṣads, the first embodiment inherits the fullness of Brahman which may be symbolized by his being omniform. Incidentally, the repeated verses once again draw our attention to the fact that both *yoni* and *garbha* are terms that can designate the Womb of Brahman.⁶

The MNU can assign Prajāpati to another source. Verse 64 lets it be known that Prajāpati is the first-born of *ṛta*, cosmic law. In this verse, a repetition of VS 32.11, *ṛta* probably can take the place of Brahman because *ṛta* and Brahman are considered identical (cf. Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa IV.1.4.10).

Now how are we to interpret verse 536 where it is said that Puruṣa is born from the *ṛta*? Probably this way: the Upaniṣad continues a view ushered in by the Brāhmaṇas namely, that Prajāpati is identified with Puruṣa.⁷ But Puruṣa-Prajāpati stems from a higher source, variously designated as *Ṛta*, or Brahman (which may be seen as the Brahman-Womb). Nowhere is the supremacy of the Brahman-Womb more forcefully expressed than in verse 535. It states that from knowledge comes bliss, the womb which is Brāhman. That is, the knowledge gained by meditation is the knowledge of the *brahmayoni*, experienced as bliss (*ānanda*).

A third concept which this Upaniṣad continues – in addition to the Brahman-Womb and Puruṣa-Prajāpati – is that of a particular worldview. The opening verse contains a linchpin within the cosmographic schema known throughout the Vedas. It mentions the *nāka*, the firmament, or vault of heaven, separating the manifest from the transcendental spheres. From the time of the Rīg Veda and Atharva Veda, it is clear that the region above the *nāka* is the place wherein the omniform or *viśvarūpa* creator resides. This worldview has not changed by the time of the MNU. Both the Brahman-Womb and Prajāpati are situated on the back of the *nāka* (verse 1); fullness defines them both and in the case of Prajāpati his "largeness" (verse 1) and his "manifold" condition make specific reference to the fullness of the embodied creative energy. The spheres that the *nāka* separates have also not undergone much change from the time of the RV to the MNU. These elements within the larger cosmographic schema appear to have remained stable throughout the first millenium B.C.

⁴ See Jan Gonda, *Notes on Brahman*, Utrecht, 1950, p. 43, and Chapter 3, p. 35.

⁵ The numbering of the verses used here coordinate with Varenne's numbers.

⁶ Both terms are used throughout in this sense. For *yoni*, see BAU I.4.11 (in Chapter 8), ŚU V.5 and V.6. For *garbha* see ŚU II.16 (Chapter 9).

⁷ This is taken up in detail in Chapter 6.

One purpose of these cosmographic elements is to establish the existence of an unseen region from which originate all subsequent manifestations. A mystery is thereby sustained and it is this: That which is phenomenal owes its existence to a completely "other." Both the Power and its Place are totally beyond the ken of the worldly. From the invisible region above the vault of heaven, the unseen, divine power emits those forms that populate the world, including its own manifestation. (These conditions, it will be remembered, underlie my Definition 3 on divine multiplicity.) The region above the vault, or *nāka*, can be called *svār* when its radiance is being emphasized.⁸ The luminous quality of the highest heaven is recognized in the opening verse of the MNU, wherein *jyotir* acts as metonymy for *svār*. The transcendental nature of this luminous region is declared in verse 4 of the MNU: "It [i.e. the womb] (is) in the imperishable (*akṣara*),⁹ in the highest heaven (*paramē vyōman*)." Then the Mahānārāyaṇa Upaniṣad goes on to acknowledge what has been acknowledged from virtually the beginning of the Vedas. From this highest heaven begins the mysterious process whereby the transcendental Supreme brings forth all that is living on earth (cf. verse 7). However there is some difference. The difference, as we shall see below, is that the Upaniṣad identifies both Nārāyaṇa and Rudra with the Large Puruṣa and thereby positions the personal god into a cosmography allowing for manifestations.

Keeping in mind that this text identifies Nārāyaṇa and Rudra with Puruṣa-Prajāpati, the text's understanding of Puruṣa-Prajāpati and his distinction from Brahman deserve close scrutiny. Distinctions of kind are few. Both Puruṣa (vs. 25)-Prajāpati (v. 1) and Brahman (vs. 9) are larger than the large. Accordingly, fullness belongs to both and both transcend materiality. Distinctions pertain mainly to the presence or absence of manifestation, and therefore also to the substantive composition of each. Whereas the states of *avyakta* and *anantarūpa* belong to Brahman (verse 10), they do not belong to Puruṣa-Prajāpati. *Avyakta* begins to designate in the Upaniṣads the unmanifest, specifically that power which is higher or larger than the Large Person.¹⁰ *Anantarūpa* ("boundless"; i.e. "of endless or unlimited form") effectively dissolves the notion of "form" altogether. *Anantarūpa* proclaims the boundlessness of the Supreme which, being unconditioned totality, ceases to have any kind of limitations.

None other than this [i.e. Brahman] is indeed higher (or) more subtle
[It is that] which is higher than high, larger than large.
[It is that] which is one, unmanifest, boundless,
totality, ancient [primordial?], beyond darkness.¹¹

⁸ The Rig Veda acknowledges this condition in 4.50.4 where it is said that this region, also called *parama-vyōman*- (i.e. the highest heaven because it is above the visible sky), is filled with great celestial light (*mahō jyōtiṣaḥ paramē vyōman*).

⁹ Here as in the Rig Veda, there is a close association between *paramē vyōman*, *akṣara* and *brāhman*. See J.A.B. van Buitenen, "Akṣara" *JAOS* 79.3, 1959, 178-179.

¹⁰ It is also called the Large Ātman, the self-embodiment of the creative principle; see J.A.B. van Buitenen, "The Large Ātman", 106-107.

¹¹ MNU verses 9.10; *ataḥ param nānyad anīyasam hi parāt param yaṁ mahato mahāntam yad ekam avyaktam anantarūpam viśvaṁ purāṇam tamasaḥ parastāt*.

Puruṣa-Prajāpati has some kind of form though it is subtle and not gross. Puruṣa-Prajāpati is called Mahat Yaśas in verses 19–20. The verses are a near-repeat of ŚU IV.19,¹² where the epithet is applied to Rudra. Already it was noted when discussing Rudra, that Mahat Yaśas, or Great Glory, connotes a divinity of huge dimensions and subtle form.¹³ The shimmering, apparitional quality associated with the subtle nature of Puruṣa's form is indicated in several ways in the Mahānārāyaṇa Upaniṣad. Elaborations ultimately suggest an entity having a huge, radiant, or light, body. Verse 15 informs that Puruṣa is *vidyut*, that is shining; verse 25 describes the Large Puruṣa as having the colour of the sun. Verse 21 affirms that he has form (*rūpa*) but it cannot be seen with the eye; it can be realized through a process of introspection (see verse 22). Whereas Brahman is transcendental, unmanifest, a pervasive fullness, a limitless expanse of forms, Puruṣa-Prajāpati is colossal, radiant, undetected by ordinary sense perceptions, endowed with a subtle form which is *viśvarūpa* in nature. Being *viśvarūpa* is being a container of forms; it is therefore a state that contrasts with Brahman's state of *anantarūpa*. Verses 53–54 in the MNU contain the *viśvarūpa* description pertaining to [Puruṣa-] Prajāpati. Once again use is being made of Rig Veda 10.81.3, so that the original multiplicity attribution given to Viśvakarman is here given over to Puruṣa-Prajāpati.¹⁴ In sum, at the outset of this Upaniṣad, the *viśvarūpa* body of Puruṣa-Prajāpati comes from Brahman (considered "The Womb"). The omniform image here applied to Puruṣa-Prajāpati can describe Rudra in Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad III.3. Both instances show the continued validity of Definition 1 pertaining to the multiplicity convention.

The Mahānārāyaṇa asserts that Puruṣa-Prajāpati is none other than Nārāyaṇa, an important god in the several centuries around the Christian era who enters into the Viṣṇuite mainstream. In verses 237–238, the names Puruṣa and Nārāyaṇa are used interchangeably.¹⁵ In verse 226, Nārāyaṇa is called Puruṣa. These verses are part of what may be called a "Nārāyaṇa Litany" (comprising verses 201–269), and they form the central section of the Upaniṣad. The Litany shifts unto Nārāyaṇa the imagery that previous sections appropriated to Puruṣa-Prajāpati. Accordingly, Nārāyaṇa is of the essence of Brahman (*brahmatattva*- vs. 242), but not of its *anantarūpa* nature. Nārāyaṇa is *brāhman* with form.

[Let us adore] the god with a thousand heads, with all eyes, the source of well-being for all. Nārāyaṇa, totality (as) god, the imperishable, the highest abode.¹⁶

In this verse a rather remarkable mixture of attributes occurs. The first set of attributes (in verse 235), fits unto Nārāyaṇa the *viśvarūpa* body of the Cosmic Puruṣa. The second

¹² The MNU omits "there is no *pratimā* of him", and substitutes "there is none who is his ruler."

¹³ See Chapter 9, p. 105, Mahat Yaśas may also be translated as "Large Splendour" and I do wonder whether this would not be a better translation. It would suggest that the "mahā" body, because of its subtle nature, could be considered a body of light, and it frequently is.

¹⁴ See Chapter 9, pp. 101–102, Verses 53–54 are not an exact repetition of RV 10.81.3, but are sufficiently exact for the multiplicity description.

¹⁵ These verses also appear in the Draviḍa recension as verse 2, Eleventh Anuvāka. See Deussen's translation, *Sixty Upaniṣads*, 257.

¹⁶ MNU 235. *sahasraśīrṣam devam viśvāksam viśvaśambhuvam*

MNU 236. *viśvam nārāyaṇam devam akṣaram paramam padam.*

set (in verse 236), connects Nārāyaṇa with those attributes reserved for *brāhman* in the beginning of the Upaniṣad; see for example verses 4 and 10 and the specific Sanskrit terminologies used.¹⁷ The point is that Nārāyaṇa is the embodied *brāhman*; his is the shape or body composed of the *brāhman* nature. Verses 237–238 confirm this point:

[Let us adore] Nārāyaṇa (who is) everywhere, the highest, eternal, the universal,
Hari Even all this (world) [is] Puruṣa; he supports all this.

Nārāyaṇa can be everywhere, the highest, eternal and universal because he partakes of the essence of Brahman. He can be the support of the whole world because he is the sum total of all potential forms. As such Nārāyaṇa is equal to the world as it is, was and will be. Verse 245 says it rather well: “Nārāyaṇa abides, pervading all this (world) within and without.” Basically all that can be said about Nārāyaṇa comes together under the rubric “Mahā/Large”. Nārāyaṇa is “Mahā Nārāyaṇa” because he supports all life-forms; he is everywhere and everything because he represents the fullness of Brahman in its first crystallized shape. The perponderance of *viśva* (i.e. all) and *viśva* derivatives used in verses 235–240 affirm that Nārāyaṇa inherits the completeness of Brahman. That is why his body assumes the shape of the *viśvarūpa* body of the Cosmic Puruṣa. And just as Puruṣa, his body may be a body of light (*nārāyaṇaḥ paro jyotir . . .* vs. 241), which is compared to the radiant sun (vs. 254; for Puruṣa see *supra*). The intent remains the same. It is to approximate in words the idea of the first evolute arising from the fullness of Brahman. The image of shimmering immateriality occurs in another description of Nārāyaṇa.

Inside of him is a subtle space, in it rests all (the world),
In his middle is a large fire, all-blazing, facing everywhere.¹⁸

Some of the things released from the subtle space within Nārāyaṇa are described in some detail in verses 203–206. A concentration of things in sets of seven begins the list. From Nārāyaṇa arise seven breaths, seven flames, (seven) logs, seven tongues, these seven *lokas* in which circulate the breaths, placed seven times seven within the hidden space. From him issue forth all the oceans and the mountains, the rivers and all forms; from him all plants and (their) juices, and the inner soul are produced. Mahā Nārāyaṇa thus repeats within himself the form and function of Mahā Puruṣa, just as Rudra does in the Śvetāśvātara and even in this Upaniṣad. With equal ease “the Lord, the Large One” (*mahimānam īśam*) can apply to Nārāyaṇa (MNU verse 202) and to Rudra (ŚU III.20). Do the features of “The Large One” change from one god to another? Yes, in so far as the first *śaiḥva* embodiment in this text probably has five faces and Nārāyaṇa does not. No, in so far as the quality of their *mahā* nature. It is that of a colossal being devoid of gross materiality. The Large One is perforce a subtle being whose immanence is compared to shimmering light. His largeness is the result of being filled with the totality of creation and this state

¹⁷ I do believe that *paramam padam* in MNU 236 designates the same place as *parama vyōman* in MNU 4. Both refer to the highest heaven, the region above the *nāka* wherein the Brahman and the initial embodiment of Brahman are situated.

¹⁸ Verses 251–252.

is symbolized by his huge spacial dimensions and/or his state of being omniform. This is certainly the image of Mahā Nārāyaṇa in the Upaniṣad that bears his name.

It has not been sufficiently emphasized that this is also the image of Rudra in the Mahānārāyaṇa Upaniṣad. In a sequence of verses (291–296), the all-encompassing nature of Rudra is established by means of terminology similar to that applied to Mahā Nārāyaṇa:

291: Indeed all (the world) is Rudra; let homage be given to this Rudra.

292: Verily, Rudra is Puruṣa, the Large Being, again and again salutations.

293: All existence, the visible world, manifoldly born and what is being born,

294: This very Rudra is all this, let homage be given to this Rudra.

295: To Rudra, to the manifest One, to the most liberal, to the powerful One, what is the most beneficent [name or prayer] that we may utter in [our] hearts?

296: Even all the universe is this Rudra, let homage be given to this Rudra.

These are the concluding prayers within a larger hymn of adoration to the greatness of Rudra. The entire set of prayers (verses 270–296) may be considered a Rudra Litany, and the religious equivalent of verses 201–269, comprising the Nārāyaṇa Litany. The opening verse of the Rudra Litany (verse 270) invokes the cosmic power of Rudra which underlies the entire activity of the world, namely the evolution and involution of forms, that is, the creation and destruction of life: “Homage to the Lord of Destruction, homage to him who puts an end to destruction.”¹⁹ In effect, Rudra is recognized as the universal cosmic power which in its undifferentiated state is both destructive and creative. The concluding verses cited above (291–296) declare in various ways that Rudra and the world are one. All existence at all times is generated by Rudra (see verses 293–4, just as Nārāyaṇa issues forth the world-stuff, re: vss. 203–206 above). For both creators, creation is still the expulsion of forms, and, the best analogy for cosmic creation remains that of cosmic birth.

The image of Rudra, the creator, continues to be organized around the image of Mahā Puruṣa. Rudra’s epithet *sat mahat* (i.e. “the large Being” in verse 292) evokes a process, already evident in the Kauṣītaki Brāhmaṇa and firmly established in the Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad, whereby the Large Puruṣa’s imagery is transposed unto Rudra. Perhaps that is why there is a somewhat facile interchange of descriptions between Rudra and Puruṣa. For example, Puruṣa-Prajāpati is Mahat Yaśas in MNU verse 20, whereas this is Rudra’s epithet in ŚU IV.19. Or, Puruṣa-Prajāpati resides in the Brahman-Womb in MNU verse 51, and this is the residence of Rudra-Maheśvara in ŚU II.16.

This brings up the interesting observation on the frequency of parallel passages shared by the Śvetāśvatara and the Mahānārāyaṇa Upaniṣads. Varenne, working with the Āndhra

¹⁹ The translation supposes, as does the *Vedic Word-Concordance* III, p. 448, that *nidhanapatāntikāya* should be *nidhanapatyāntikāya*. The opening verses in the Litany (nos. 270–276), are in the Āndhra recension and they are not confirmed by Sāyaṇa and Bhāṭṭabhaskara, the commentators of the Draviḍa recension.

recension, cites nine parallel passages. The Mahānārāyaṇa also demonstrates stylistic features that favour Rudra. For example, the Upaniṣad may quote a series of verses from the Rig Veda Saṃhitā, but cut the repetition to inject a passage from the Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad which mentions Rudra by name.²⁰ Another example occurs in the series of formulas affecting the gāyatrī (verses 71–82) which precede the Rudra Litany. The opening “gāyatrī” is to Puruṣa, the thousand-eyed Mahādeva, known as Rudra (vs. 71). This verse is followed by the second “gāyatrī” to Puruṣa/Mahādeva/Rudra (vs. 72). These features, together with the image of Rudra as it emerges from the Litany in this work, testify to the importance of Rudra in the Mahānārāyaṇa Upaniṣad.

It need come as no surprise that Rudra and Nārāyaṇa are closely connected in this text, probably on account of their being both related to Mahā Puruṣa. It must be clear from the foregoing that both gods are “The Large One” because both are considered the embodied form of Brahman. Both are huge, radiant beings eternally full with potential life-forms. Of particular interest is that both have a gracious, or *śiva* nature (for Rudra, see vs. 274; cf. vs. 282; and see ŚU III.5; for Nārāyaṇa, see vs. 239; note that the gentle aspect of Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa occurs in the Bhagavad Gītā, discussed in Chapter XI.B). In verse 470, Nārāyaṇa is identified with Rudra and the sacrifice, the Vaṣat sound and Indra.²¹ The identification is sustained in the Mahābhārata. In one long passage (XII.328), wherein the significance of Nārāyaṇa’s various names are explained, the god says that he and Rudra form a conceptual unit. He who worships Maheśvara worships Nārāyaṇa; Rudra is Nārāyaṇa’s self or soul (*ātman*) and Nārāyaṇa worships Rudra. Rudra is Nārāyaṇa, the One displayed in two different forms (cf. XII.328.19–24). (Possibly a pronouncement of conceptual unity such as this helped to foster later union of the two in religious imagery and temple planning. In the case of the former there is of course the Harihara icon. In the case of the latter, two examples come to mind. A Nārāyaṇa *devakula* close to the *śaivite* Viniteśvari temple at Mundeśvari is mentioned in an inscription of the 4th or 7th century A.D.; at Sunet there is indication of temples dedicated both to Śiva and Nārāyaṇa).²²

If we now turn to the Mahānārāyaṇa Upaniṣad’s speculative advances regarding Rudra, our attention must focus first on the expanded nature of the subtle or *liṅga* body of the god. Advancements elaborate upon notions in the Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad and therefore a brief review of the latter may be in order: a central notion of that work is that Brahman is a triad, moving away from its unmanifest state towards its manifest state. Three-fold Brahman, the theistic viewpoint implies, consists of a formless body, a subtle body and an earthly body. The implication is gleaned from a set of terms. A metaphor on

²⁰ For example, MNU verses 35–50 repeat, out of sequence, RV 10.121.1–8. MNU verses 51–52 are closely associated with ŚU II.16. Another example in MNU verses 215–222 which are RV 4.58.1–4, instead of continuing to repeat verses from this hymn, MNU 223–226 is a variation of ŚU III.4 (which mentions “Rudra”) and a repeat of III.9.

²¹ Varenne, *Mahā Nārāyaṇa* I, p. 115, identifies “Nārāyaṇa-Prajāpati” with the short group of formulas in his Part XII. Vaṣatkāra- recalls the creative power of sound, cf. J.A.B. van Buitenen, “Studies in Sāṃkhya (II)”, *JAOS* 77.1, 1957, 17.

²² On both these temples, see D.M. Srinivasan, “Bhagavān Nārāyaṇa: A Colossal Kushan Icon”, *Pakistan Archaeology*, full reference in fn. 51.

the apprehension of god indicates that “mūrti” is latent in “līṅga” and both originate from the “yoni”. Names and qualifiers associated with these terms give further information on the triune nature of the Supreme. So, the Womb (i.e. “yoni”) is equated with Para Brahman [which may also be linked to the incipient notion of a Para Śiva in this text]. The material form (i.e. “mūrti”, also “tanū”) is described as a “śivā tanū”. The subtle form (i.e. “līṅga”) comes after the source (or “yoni”); it therefore stands in the same relation to the Supreme as does Maheśvara and Rudra (called Mahā Puruṣa) who also come right after the Supreme source. But the Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad does not probe further into the second, “līṅga” body; and, in fact this second body is rather difficult to grasp. It falls somewhere between that which is totally “other” and that which is within the domain of phenomenality. Provocatively nebulous, it belongs somewhere between the transcendental and the phenomenal. But the Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad offers little guidance on the relationships between the līṅga body and the body above it and the body below it.

It is precisely in clarifying the “līṅga”, or subtle body of god, that the Mahānārāyaṇa Upaniṣad makes major strides. Greater precision concerns the powers inherent in the subtle body. The supposition that the “līṅga body” gives rise to a subsequent body, which was implicit but not explicit in the Śvetāśvatara, now becomes clearer. The expanded teaching on the nature of the līṅga body of god occurs in the aforementioned Rudra Litany (i.e. MNU verses 270–296). Verses 271–275 have a specific internal pattern. Together they form an ode to the eternal all-līṅga (Sarvalīṅga in verse 276).²³ Individually, each verse first gives homage to a particular power or attribute of the Supreme Rudra and then to the līṅga of that power or attribute. As such, homage is given to the raised līṅga, the golden līṅga, the bright līṅga, the celestial līṅga, the Bhava līṅga, the Sarva līṅga, the auspicious līṅga, the flame līṅga, the ātman līṅga, and the supreme līṅga. This set of līṅga verses is followed by a set of prayers which again have some internal cohesiveness. Mantras 277–285 invoke a pentad of names which come to be the names of the five faces of a Pañcamukha Līṅga. The names cited are: Sadyojāta, Vāmadeva, Aghora, Tatpuruṣa and Īśāna. This is the earliest occurrence of the five names which later Śaivism considers to designate the fivefold emanatory form arising from Para Śiva. Right after the individual names of the pentad are given, that is, in verse 286, it is said: *sa eva sadāśiva om*. He . . . is indeed Sadāśiva. Om.²⁴ The next set of verses (nos. 287–290) pay worship to the One with the Golden Arm, the One of the Golden Hue, to the One of Golden Form, to the Lord of Gold, to Ambikāpati, to Umāpati, to Paśupati, to Ūrdhva-retas, Virūpākṣa and Viśvarūpa. The concluding verses 291–296 revert, as already noted above, to the opening theme of adoration to the universal ruler.

The sequence of these verses strongly suggests a progression dealing with the measured unfolding of the Supreme god, Rudra. The linkages between the stages are presented

²³ Verse 276 mentions the “sarvalīṅga” of the sun and the moon. I understand the references to these particular planets to connote the idea of “eternal” and to bestow that idea upon the prayers to the “Sarvalīṅga”. For greater analysis of the early literature and the arts (including the Mūsānagar portrayal of Maheśvara with the Sun and the Moon) using “the Sun and the Moon”, see Chapter 20, pp. 295–296.

²⁴ For the translation and exegesis of the line, see Chapter 21, p. 319.

here in sharper relief than in the Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad. The first set of “liṅga” verses comes right after homage to the undifferentiated Supreme. Either the set explains the undifferentiated, subtle state of the Supreme Rudra or it describes something evolving from the undifferentiated, which would be the subtle body beginning to form as the evolutionary process starts. In either case, the range of the powers inherent in the liṅga body is revealed. The next set of verses states a theological position not clearly advanced before. The Mahānārāyaṇa invokes the five [called “mukha”] names immediately after the series of liṅga verses. It therefore seems plausible, as will be demonstrated below, that by the time of this text, there developed the belief in an unfolding subsequent to [or within?] the *liṅga* stage, which was recognized as being fivefold in nature. The fivefold evolute has one name. It is Sadāśiva. The name comes at the end of the series itemizing the components of its fivefold nature, just as the name Sarvaliṅga comes at the end of the series enouncing the components of the all-liṅga. To repeat, after the subtle liṅga body with all its powers is disclosed, there follows a fivefold entity whose name is Sadāśiva. The names attributed to each aspect of the entity are the same as the names later associated with the five mukhas of the Pañcamukha Liṅga. This is an extremely important development because it has such close bearings upon doctrines found in the *śaiva* Āgamas. The *śaiva* Āgamas know the fivefold god Sadāśiva; the deity represents the first unfolding from *niṣkala* Para Śiva. It can be deduced that the cognizance of Sadāśiva, in the *śaiva* Āgamas, is the Pañcamukha Liṅga.²⁵

After the verses to fivefold Sadāśiva, there follows the third set of verses. They would appear not to relate to the “Sarvaliṅga” nor to the “Sadāśiva” set of verses. When viewed together, it seems that the appellations contained in these verses (Nos. 287–290), are for the most part names that could suit various anthropomorphic manifestations of god. Accordingly, the progression would end with god’s visible manifestations much like the Śvetāśvatara metaphor ends with the “mūrti” stage. The names in the Mahānārāyaṇa may therefore refer to different concrete shapes. To judge from the earliest *śaiva* icons, some images indeed answer to the names in these verses. But before a correlation is made between *śaiva* mūrtis and descriptions in the Mahānārāyaṇa, the chronological margins for this text should be set as narrowly as possible.

I propose to date the Mahānārāyaṇa to the period around the Christian era; a date of circa the first century A.D. appears justified from internal evidence within the text. Obviously our text must be after the fourth–third century B.C., the probable dates for the compilation of the Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad from which our Upaniṣad frequently quotes.²⁶ The Upaniṣad should be prior to c. 300 A.D. on the basis of the complexity of the Saṃdhyā ceremony it describes in verses 317–386. By the fourth century A.D., the ritual texts describing Saṃdhyā begin to attain a level of complexity and codification not suffi-

²⁵ See D.M. Srinivasan, “Śaiva Temple Form: Loci of God’s Unfolding Body”, in *Investigating Indian Art*, M. Yaldiz, W. Lobo eds. Berlin, 1987, 338–339, D.M. Srinivasan, “From Transcendancy to Materiality: Para Śiva, Sadāśiva and Maheśa in Indian Art”, *Artibus Asiae* Vol. L 1/2, 1990, see 108–110.

²⁶ A more conservative dating is found in A. Silburn, “Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad”, p. 6, her dates are between the sixth and the third century B.C.

ciently reflected in the Mahānārāyaṇa Upaniṣad.²⁷ While descriptions of a ritual in an Upaniṣad may not be as rigorous as in the Kalpa Sūtras and Dharma Śāstras, it should be remembered that the Mahānārāyaṇa served as a manual for the saṃnyāsin and promoted *la culte mental* (i.e. *mānasam yajñam*).²⁸ The Upaniṣad may therefore be held accountable for inclusion of at least the important and characteristic components of the ritual so that it could be performed on the mental plane.

The Saṃdhyā portion of the text contains verses that may be connected with some of the pre-fourth century A.D. components of Saṃdhyā as well as some post-fourth century descriptions of Saṃdhyā. Prior to the fourth century A.D., ritual texts usually attribute no more than five components to the Saṃdhyā ceremony.²⁹ They are: *ācamana*, *prāṇāyāma*, *mārjana*, *Gāyatrī japa* and *upasthāna*. Of these, the Mahānārāyaṇa includes the *Gāyatrī japa* (verse 341), and verses that could be associated with the *prāṇāyāma* (Nos. 336 and 338). It also includes verses that are recited in the later expanded Saṃdhyā ceremony.³⁰ However, our text does not seem to include recitations associated with the *arghya* offering, nor the regular *ācamana* recitations of Viṣṇu's names, nor the *mārjana*, and possibly the *upasthāna*³¹ recitations. It must be borne in mind however that the verses are not presented in the sequence akin to the ritual sequence found in the sūtras and śāstras and this, together with the text's lack of ritual explanations, makes it difficult to identify ritual components with much certainty. Presenting thus, an uncoded sequence of verses together with verses forecasting the more elaborate, post-fourth century Saṃdhyā ceremony, suggests that the Upaniṣad could date to the time of the Christian era.³² This dating (circa first century A.D.) would help to explain a certain dialogue, felt to exist, between ideas presented in the text and their responses in early Hindu art.

The Mahānārāyaṇa Upaniṣad brings together in some cohesive fashion the threefold typology which is the diagnostic classification of *śaiva* art in the Indian subcontinent.³³ Those verses in the so-called Rudra Litany which articulate a sequence going from the subtle all-līṅga body, to the fivefaced Sadāśiva, to the fully manifest body (or bodies) of god are in effect replicated by divine imagery.

²⁷ The ensuing information on the development of the Saṃdhyā ritual in Vedic literature is based on my study "Saṃdhyā: Myth and Ritual", *Indo-Iranian Journal* XV.3, 1973, 161-178.

²⁸ Varenne, *Mahānārāyaṇa Upaniṣad* I, p. 7.

²⁹ See D.M. Srinivasan, "Saṃdhyā", 166.

³⁰ Portions of the later *mantrācamana* are included (verses 324-326). Verses 334 and part of 335 are later regularly recited after the *saṃkalpa* and are addressed to Gāyatrī. The important *vyāhrtis* recited in the *prāṇāyāma* appear in verse 340. The Gāyatrī *sītras* spoken in the *prāṇāyāma* and the *arghya* appear in verses 342 and 349. The possibility that these recitations identify the *arghya* component must be registered. The problem is that the Mahānārāyaṇa Upaniṣad cites mantras associated with rites but does not coordinate these with indication of ritual actions. Therefore it is difficult to gauge and extrapolate ritual subtleties.

³¹ Swāmi Vimalānananda (*Mahānārāyaṇopaniṣad*, Madras 1968) indicates that verses 345-348 may substitute verses for the *upāsana*. He also considers that verses 317-320 may be some sort of *ācamana* verses. It is perhaps best to follow Varenne who does not accord much credit to this work. See Varenne, *Mahānārāyaṇa Upaniṣad* II, second edition, Paris 1986, p. 12.

³² It should be registered that Gonda dates the text to the third century B.C. See Jan Gonda, *Viṣṇuism and Śaivism*, London 1970, p. 42. The date seems rather early to me on account of the several Saṃdhyā verses which relate to the expanded, post-fourth century A.D. ritual. Also the responses in the art do not come until later ages (see below).

³³ On this, see Chapter 19, pp. 260ff.

1. The text gives the various powers of the “liṅga-body”. The art, within our timeframe, portrays the liṅga, but not with a lot of variety. The emphasis in the art is on a realistic representation of the phallus. The free-standing Liṅgas (or representations of free-standing Liṅgas), from Mathurā (Pls. 17.1 and 2) and one from Reh, show the type. Somewhat later but still prior to the fourth century A.D. we know of four plain Liṅgas found in Mathurā and neighboring regions (see Chapters 17 and 19).

2. Our text does not directly state that the five names represent the five faces or mukhas of Sadāśiva. It isolates five separate names and after them concludes with the name Sadāśiva. These same five names are listed as mukha names in the iconographic section of the Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa, a text of a possible 8th century A.D. date and northern (Kashmiri?) provenance. Section III.48 is concerned with Mahādeva; it states that the five *mukhas* of Mahābhujā (i.e. the One having large arms) are known by the names of Sadyojāta, Vāmadeva, Aghora, Tatpuruṣa and Īśāna. Here is the iconographic corroboration that these five names are a set of “mukhas” of a *śaiva* deity. Individually, each of the five names has a history commencing long before the Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa.³⁴ However, neither their separate history nor the denotation of each name is as important for iconography as their conjoint occurrence, cited for the first time in the Mahānārāyaṇa. The later *śaiva* Āgamas show that the theoretical number of mukhas on a Liṅga must be five,³⁵ and that a lesser number still refers to the symbolic and theological intent of a Pañcamukha Liṅga. Around the time of the Mahānārāyaṇa Upaniṣad, Ekamukha Liṅgas exist (e.g. Pls. 17.7; 8; 19.1) as do Caturmukha Liṅgas (e.g. Pl. 19.2), a Dvimukha Liṅga and the Śuṅga Pañcamukha Liṅga from Bhīṭā. The reason for this rather early display of ideas in art and text may be due to the antiquity of beliefs in a fivefold god, and five “mukhas” of an unfolding entity. Such beliefs can be situated in the Agnicayana ritual. Fivefold Prajāpati is an important concept in the Agnicayana.³⁶ His fivefold body (specified as *tanū-s*) is reconstituted in this spectacular rite using five “mukha” bricks in each of the five layers of the altar. (The “unfolding” connotation associated with these bricks³⁷ is wholly congenial with the theological meaning of “mukha” in the later Āgamas’ doctrine illustrated by the Pañcamukha Liṅga). Rudra is identified with Prajāpati of the Agnicayana in numerous ways; especially, he is identified with the reconstituted cosmic body of Prajāpati.³⁸ The set of [mukha] verses in the Mahānārāyaṇa Upaniṣad may be building upon these antecedents. The set of five name occurs precisely where it ought to occur – right after the set of liṅga verses – assuming that divine revelation is the theme. It therefore seems likely that the recitation of five [mukha] names in this Upaniṣad is purposefully introduced as part of the theme of Rudra’s divine unfolding. As such, an important

³⁴ See the documentation on these names and others in Gonda, *Viṣṇuism and Śivaism*.

³⁵ See Chapter 19, p. 272; cf. Chap. 17, pp. 233–234. Also see my “Śaiva Temple Forms”, 335–337 and “Para Śiva, Sadāśiva and Maheśa in Indian Art”, especially 108–109.

³⁶ See discussion in Chapter 6, page 66.

³⁷ See Chapter 14, pp. 193–194.

³⁸ See Chapter 7, p. 79, Chapter 14, p. 194 regarding the chanting of the Litany to Rudra at the completion of the building of the Agnicayana altar.

thread can be seen to run from the Agnicayana through the MNU and into the *śaiva* Āgamas; it is the notion of fivefold mukhas associated with a *śaiva* deity, who has the same name, Sadāśiva, in the MNU and in the Āgamas. The reason for the prominence of a pentad, and not some other number of names, has much to do with the language of five. Five signifies universality in a variety of ways; it is the quintessential number symbolic of all the regions, both visible and invisible. Within the cosmography of the Mahānārāyaṇa Upaniṣad, “five” may symbolize the total number of regions above, below (and including) the *nāka* and the possible communications between them.³⁹ The language of five applies the concept of totality to Sadāśiva much as the term *viśva* does when applied to Brahman (vss. 9–10) and Nārāyaṇa (vs. 236).⁴⁰ Of additional interest is that creative fullness, according to the Brhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad, is a fivefold phenomenon (see BAU 1.4.16–17, Chapter 8), a state that could nicely define Sadāśiva although the text does not come right out and say this.

In sum, the ordered sequence in which highly discreet characteristics are cited in the “Rudra Litany” of the Mahānārāyaṇa indicate that the theology of a triadic divinity and its progressive unfolding leading towards manifestation should have been known. In particular, knowledge of the unfolding of the five-faced Sadāśiva subsequent to the liṅga-body could well have been known. The characteristics include: usage of the mukha names, usage of the complete set of five mukha names, association of this set of names with Sadāśiva; positioning this set of Sadāśiva-formulas between those formulas on the powers of the liṅga-body and those formulas likely to refer to fully manifested divine forms. I would go further and say that this theological progression should have been known even before the MNU, to judge from the existence of the Bhīṭā Pañcamukha Liṅga, dating to the Śuṅga period. The use of “five mukhas” conjoint with the Liṅga in the Bhīṭā icon anticipates the theological sequence in the MNU. The icon is a reflet of the ideas fermenting in ancient Hinduism and coming to the fore in the Mahānārāyaṇa Upaniṣad.

3. Some correlation between the names in verses 288–290 and actual *śaiva* icons may be proposed. Ambikāpati (vs. 288) probably refers to the god as husband of the goddess in her role as Mother. Possible examples come from Kuṣāṇa sculptures made in Mathurā.⁴¹ In these rather small reliefs, Śiva is three-eyed, two-armed, frequently has a raised phallus, and can hold a water bottle. He stands close to the goddess who is on his left; the two embrace having their arms about each other. Umāpati (vs. 288) may be represented on the coin of the Kuṣāṇa King Huviṣka. The coin bears the inscription Ommo-Oesho. The coin depicts the female (on the left) wearing an ankle-length dress, a diadem with streamers and carrying a flower (?). Oesho, who stands opposite and apart from Ommo (i.e. Umā), is four-armed, encircled with a nimbus and wears a diadem. He holds a vajra

³⁹ Cf. AVŚ 13.1.7 in Chapter 3. For the symbolism of “five” already evident in the Agnicayana, see Chapter 6, p. 72.

⁴⁰ For the complete discussion on the symbolism of this number see Chapter 6, pp. 72–75, and Chapter 12, pp. 163–167, also Chapter 17, pp. 233–235.

⁴¹ See G. Kreisel, *Die Śiva-Bildwerke der Mathura-Kunst*, Stuttgart, 1986, Figs. 102–104.

in the upper right; a bottle in the lower right; a trident in the upper left and he holds an animal by the horns in the lower left hand.⁴² As both Umā and Ambikā belong to *śaiva* mythology, there ought to be some conceptual and therefore visual distinctions, between them and their “pati-s”, since the MNU mentions both. The deities on the coin and those on the Mathurā reliefs are in fact quite different. Perhaps Ambikā belongs more to the Gangetic cultural sphere⁴³ than Umā who stems from the North (“Uma of the Snowy Himalayas” according to the Kena Upaniṣad). Accordingly, perhaps Śiva is Ambikāpati in the Mathurā reliefs depicting the couple as the auspicious pair (*mithuna*),⁴⁴ a concept deeply rooted in Brahmanism. He may be Umāpati on the Huviṣka coin, whose legend would permit of this suggestion. Paśupati (v. 288) cannot be identified in the early art. The description supplied by Rao, based on the Aṃśumadbhedāgama and the Śilparatna, makes it clear that there is no animal present in this image, and that the god is four-armed. He holds the trident in the upper right, the rosary in the upper left hand; the lower right is in *abhaya* mudrā and the lower left is in *varada* mudrā.⁴⁵ No early image fits this description. Ūrdhvaretas (i.e. the One with the raised phallus; vs. 290), ought to be the name of the god when this feature is the dominant one. Usually this feature is incorporated into an image emphasizing other characteristics as well. There is only one early image which could answer this appellation. It is the unique Śuṅga colossus found at Rṣikeśa, U.P. (see Pl. 17.10). Virūpākṣa (vs. 290) is a name occurring in a list of lesser deities in the Mānava Gṛhya Sūtra (2.15). It also is a term used to describe the Yakṣa who shows himself to Yudhiṣṭhira in the Mahābhārata.⁴⁶ In the Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa (III.57), the name is applied to the flame-faced god with whirling eyes, raised hair, and a beard and moustache. He has two hands and carries a long staff and reins. The peculiar hair and eyes are answered well in the fragment of a Kuṣāṇa head made in Mathurā (see Pl. 19.15), which I identify as an early Virūpākṣa.⁴⁷ The last name in this series is Viśvarūpa, the Lord as the Omniform One (vs. 290). What sort of an image does “Viśvarūpa” imply? Up to the Upaniṣads, the answer to this question was uncomplicated. To be omniform was to possess the total number of multiple bodily parts and forms. The opening verse of the Puruṣasūkta was the paradigm for the image. The Upaniṣads do not abandon this paradigm but, I believe, they add an alternate. To be omniform can now be a state of completeness mythopoeically symbolized by the full womb of Brahman. The Bṛhadāraṇyaka and the Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣads show how the

⁴² See Robert Göbl, *System und Chronologie der Münzprägung des Kuṣānreiches*, Wien 1984. See coin No. 310 and description on page 44.

⁴³ Ambikā appears already in early Vedic literature but as the sister of Rudra. See the Vajasaneyi Saṃhitā (III.5, cf. MS 1.10.20, Taitt. Brāhmaṇa 1.6.10). Ambikā together with her sisters Amba and Ambalika appear in the Aśvamedha ritual and of course in the Mahābhārata.

⁴⁴ Cf. Kreisel (*Śiva-Bildwerke*), identifies the pair as Śiva and Umā. I am not too convinced with this identification since the female does not closely resemble Ommo on the Huviṣka coin and the male on both the coin and the Mathurā reliefs is also correspondingly different.

⁴⁵ See T.A. Gopinath Rao, *Elements of Hindu Iconography*, Vol. II, Pt. 1, p. 125.

⁴⁶ See Chapter 15, p. 208.

⁴⁷ Cf. Chapter 19, p. 267. Some scholars understand Virūpākṣa to refer to “the One with oblique eyes” and they then point out the treatment of the eyes on the Gudimallam Śiva as an answer to this appellation. See I.K. Sarma, *The Development of early śaiva Art and Architecture*, Delhi, 1982, p. 55.

first embodiment of the transcendental can be a multiformed god, but it can also be god as a colossal, immaterial body. Largeness of height as well as girth, and indistinctiveness due to the subtle materiality of form can convey the same notion of "fullness". The existence of a *śaiva viśvarūpa* image seems assured from later accounts. According to the Agni Purāṇa, Viśvarūpa Śiva has a gaping mouth, a thousand heads, faces, hands, feet and liṅgas (alternately a thousand subtle particles of light) among other characteristics.⁴⁸ But during the several centuries around the Christian era such an image has not yet come forth. How then are we to interpret the "Viśvarūpa" epithet in the Mahānārāyaṇa Upaniṣad? It concludes a series of epithets, ostensibly signifying various fully manifested figures of god. As such, it could just be possible that "Viśvarūpa" is the all-inclusive name of the various forms, much like the names "Sarvaliṅga" and "Sadāśiva" follow their respective sets of formulas. There is another precedent. Śatarudrīya means "one hundred forms of Rudra" and in effect it is another way to refer to the god's "Viśvarūpa" nature. The Śatarudrīya is a litany of the extraordinary range of manifestations that comprise god's Viśvarūpa nature. A few of the epithets found in the MNU are also there in the Śatarudrīya Litany.⁴⁹ Possibly, just as the Śatarudrīya Litany refers to individual forms that comprise the god Śatarudrīya, so could Viśvarūpa refer to the series of manifested forms. I suspect, however, that the prior names refer to a different type of emanation than does Viśvarūpa. From my understanding of the variety of Brahmanic contexts in which a *viśvarūpa* god occurs, I surmise that Viśvarūpa shows himself as a result of an epiphany. I am not so convinced that the other names mentioned in the set imply a revelation of that nature. (This assumption is conjectural, but hard not to mention since it results from an overall impression gained from working with the entire Brāhmaṇic textual tradition.) These interpretations of the epithet "Viśvarūpa" do not preclude the existence of an image. Therefore the question remains: "Does the epithet relate to an iconic form?" I believe it ought to, even though I cannot designate a specific image. But perhaps we can look for images which express the omniform state without using the multiplicity convention. Perhaps we can look for an image portraying "fullness", the alternate mode of expressing omniform, or *viśvarūpa*. Perhaps the search should be for a colossus (in height as well as girth), possibly with apparitional and radiant qualities, a *śaiva* Mahā Yakṣa image, as it were. Or perhaps patience is all that is needed to await the appearance of an early *śaiva* image having many heads, arms, eyes (possibly feet) etc. that is yet to come out of the ground. Of course, it may never surface. To construct a Viśvarūpa image is technically most demanding.⁵⁰ Perhaps the necessary technical skills for such a construction were not yet adequately developed in the Kuṣāṇa period, though the religious and devotional readiness to worship such an image was already present.

⁴⁸ See M.-T. Mallmann, *L'Agni-Purāṇa*, Paris, 1963, p. 52. The author dates the text close to the time of the Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa. Cf. T.A. Gopinath Rao, *Elements of Hindu Iconography*, II, Pt. 1, 2nd ed., Varanasi, 1971, p. 180.

⁴⁹ TS 4.5.2 has "Hiraṇyabāhu", as does MNU vs. 287, TS 4.5.5 has "Paśupati", as does MNU vs. 288. TS 4.5.4 has "Viśvarūpa", as does MNU vs. 290.

⁵⁰ A sculptor's job in carving Kuṣāṇa divine representations was vastly less complex and demanding in compositional layout and depiction of interrelated figures than is warranted for a portrayal of a Viśvarūpa image.

The above-mentioned images, comprising a threefold typology, represent the needs of the *śaiva* bhakta worshipping within the Brāhmaṇical domain. His needs on the stage of ancient Hinduism have been followed from the time his laudations were expressed in the Śatarudrīya Litany, to expressions in the more esoteric eulogies of the Śvetāśvatara and Mahānārāyaṇa Upaniṣads.

Mahā Nārāyaṇa too exists as a mūrti. The mūrti fashioned in Mathurā during the Kuṣāṇa period emphasizes two characteristics: 1) largeness expressing the *mahā* quality and 2) Brahmanic asceticism expressive of the essential nature of Nārāyaṇa.⁵¹ The result is a colossal statue whose every detail bespeaks of the Supreme god as Brahmanic ascetic (see Pls. 18.7 & 8). It is interesting to remember that Mahā Nārāyaṇa is described as *viśvarūpa* in the Mahānārāyaṇa Upaniṣad, but in the Kuṣāṇa sculpture the omniform quality is expressed by way of the full container rather than to what it contains. God is full or large in height (somewhat in girth). There is no indication of multiple bodily parts and forms. Images of Mahā Nārāyaṇa continue to be made after the Kuṣāṇa period. True there are not many, but the few that are known are mainly colossi, making my point more secure. Cunningham reported a large Gupta (?) Nārāyaṇa from Rup Bas (former Bharatpur State), and, another 9' image of Nārāyaṇa with Lakṣmī kneeling at his feet, and three recumbent sculptures of huge dimensions. One is 20', 6" in length; it is supposed to represent Yudhiṣṭhira with Nārāyaṇa standing on his shoulders and surrounded by the Five Paṇḍavas.⁵² (Nārāyaṇa is a very important deity in the epic.) The post-Kuṣāṇa Nārāyaṇa images I know (that have the multiplicity feature) attribute four arms to this god.⁵³ The other qualities found in textual descriptions of a large or *mahā* being – shimmering radiance, subtleness of form – are not evident in the Kuṣāṇa Mahā Nārāyaṇa. But, the second characteristic in the Kuṣāṇa statue, namely Brāhmaṇic asceticism, also interfaces with the text. The statue depicts a Brāhmaṇic ascetic because Nārāyaṇa is the divine embodiment of the earthly Brāhmaṇic ascetic, that is, the Vedic seer or ṛṣi.⁵⁴ A number which symbolizes asceticism is “seven”: The stable number of Ṛṣis throughout Brāhmaṇic literature is seven.⁵⁵ Seven is closely allied to the sphere of the ritual and those divinities who exemplify sacerdotal qualities.⁵⁶ The Mahānārāyaṇa connects this

⁵¹ Analysis of this image is in two publications. D.M. Srinivasan, “God as Brahmanical Ascetic. A Colossal Kushan Icon of the Mathurā School”, *Journal of the Indian Society of Oriental Art*, N.S.X. (1978–1979), 1ff. D.M. Srinivasan, “Bhagavān Nārāyaṇa: A Colossal Kushan Icon”, *Pakistan Archaeology*, No. 26 (1991), 263–271. Unfortunately, the paper has been printed without my prior proofreading, it is too full of errors to be reliable in many cases, especially Sanskritic terms. See also Chapter 18, pp. 243–245.

⁵² See D.M. Srinivasan, “Bhagavān Nārāyaṇa”, 267 & fn. 30.

⁵³ E.g. D.M. Srinivasan, “Bhagavān Nārāyaṇa”, 267.

⁵⁴ See D.M. Srinivasan, “God as Brahmanical Ascetic”, esp. pp. 4–8, D.M. Srinivasan, “Bhagavān Nārāyaṇa”, 265–266.

⁵⁵ This feature is well brought out in a curious book by John E. Mitchiner, entitled *Traditions of the Seven Ṛṣis*, Delhi, 1982. The one question the author has not asked himself is why the number of ṛṣis should consistently be seven. The question can be tackled if there is awareness of the language of numbers operating in Brāhmaṇic texts. Even the author's observation that some Vedic lists of ṛṣis extend the number by “one”, (see his p. 45), can be readily analyzed by recourse to the “x plus 1” factor operating in the Vedic language of numbers (see Chapter 12).

⁵⁶ On Brhaspati and “seven” (and further references), see Chapter 2, p. 31. For the Agnicayana altar as well as other Vedic sacerdotal references to “seven”, see Chapter 6, pp. 72–74.

number to the god. It has collected (in vss. 203–204), a series of seven cosmic items in recounting creations that proceed from Nārāyaṇa.

The time has come to close the circle. The opening verses of this Upaniṣad announce, by way of key terms and concepts, the retention of a Vedic cosmography applicable to divine manifestation. It places Puruṣa-Prajāpati, enclosed in the Brahman-Womb, into the invisible sphere wherefrom his emission as the first embodiment of Brahman is possible. In identifying this embodiment with both Mahā Nārāyaṇa and (Mahā Puruṣa as) Rudra, it may be deduced that the manifestations of these two gods could also originate from this same invisible sphere. The text does not specifically state this, but I think the implication is there, together with the probability of the continued validity of the multiplicity definition (number 3), locked into these conditions. Besides the continuation of the ancient cosmography, the Mahānārāyaṇa contains numerous other continuities: the cosmic birth analogy, the *viśvarūpa* literary image, number symbolism involving “5” and “7”, repetition of Vedic passages some of which exemplify a multiplicity definition (i.e. Number 1), and lastly, the apparent retention of Definitions 1 and 3, themselves. All these concepts are holdovers in a text whose sophisticated and highly selective religious imagery is mirrored in several mūrtis. It can only be concluded that in spite of approximately a millenium of religious development and change, quite a number of notions pertaining to divine multiplicity weave through time and space, and arrive without undue enfeeblement at the doorstep of sectarian image making.

Another conclusion can be drawn. The text brings together the old and the new in notable ways. Old, or better traditional, notions on number symbolism and cosmology, especially the birth of the body-of-god imageries from the Brāhmaṇas and the older Upaniṣads, are fused into one view on the progressive unfolding of a *śaiṣa* triune divinity. *Śaiṣa* art reflects this view. It features the three types of images symbolic of the triune divinity: *liṅga*, *mukhaliṅga*, full anthropomorphic figure. So too, the *viśvarūpa* notion continues side by side with the notion of fullness, dear to the elite group of Upaniṣadic thinkers. In addition to verses ascribing a plethora of multiple bodily parts and forms to the creator, this Upaniṣad, as several earlier ones analyzed above, attribute fullness to the creator who is the first embodiment of Ultimate Fullness (Brahman or the Brahman-Womb). *Mahā* is the technical word referring to this type of cosmic fullness. It has a visual exponent: the colossus suggestive of a radiant presence. In effect, the Upaniṣads make clear that there are two ways to express the omniform nature of the creator and only one of them employs the multiplicity convention. Interpretation of early art forms, such as the Mahā Nārāyaṇa image, stand to benefit from that clarification. The same applies to Mahā Yakṣa images. A Mahā Yakṣa is an entity closely involved in the creation process, indeed this is an entity encapsulating more features from the myth of the Pregnant Male than any other divinity, yet the entity is devoid of the multiplicity convention in art. A Mahā Yakṣa, when concretized, is of course a colossus exhibiting amplitude in girth as well as vagueness in particularization. These characteristics apply to the first, subtle evolute of Brahman. Older Vedic texts imply that the Yakṣa's fullness is due to the life-force that he personifies. Now comes the Mahānārāyaṇa Upaniṣad upon the heels of the Bṛhadāraṇyaka and Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣads to elucidate things further: The fullness

of Mahā Yakṣa does express his omniform condition but by a mode other than the one employing the multiplicity convention.

The Mahānārāyaṇa Upaniṣad narrows the gap between religious imagery and its expression in art; ancient schema, definitions and symbols now appear as mūrtis. But there exists one important obstacle towards a neat closing of the gap; our corpus of images stems mainly from above the Vindhya Mountains and the text appears to be mainly of southern inspiration. Possibly a southern center of Brahmanic art and religion (perhaps Nagarjunikonda is a good, albeit theoretical, candidate) would be able to close the gap better. When, in the next chapter, the epic is scanned for religious imagery pertinent to the multiplicity convention, reciprocity between art and religion will become even more apparent. But – and this is a big but – with the epic we move into a very different type of literature than the one surveyed so far. Irrespective of the claim in some quarters that the Mahābhārata is the fifth Veda, the epic is not part of the canonical Vedas. It does not have the same focussed objective as Vedic Literature, namely a concentration on things connected with the efficacious performance of Vedic rituals. Because of this narrow scope, the fact that a Vedic text like the Mahānārāyaṇa Upaniṣad does enter into dialogue with sectarian art probably deserves the extraction of a final lesson.

It is an obvious one. The reason the Mahānārāyaṇa Upaniṣad, whose purpose is totally unrelated to art and iconography, can nevertheless comment on the meaning of some early *śaiva* and *vaiṣṇava* images is because the latter are the plastic expression of Vedic ideas. To say it another way, were Nārāyaṇa, Rudra and, for that matter, the Yakṣa not deeply entrenched in Vedism, it is doubtful whether this text could tell us much about the significance of the colossal Brahmanic ascetic and Mahā Yakṣa images, or the iconography of the threefold *śaiva* typology. Moreover, this text is itself deeply enmeshed in Vedism. It quotes from the Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad, a work also incorporating previous Vedic passages. The smooth transition from prior Vedic ideologies to those in the Mahānārāyaṇa Upaniṣad was demonstrated at the outset of this chapter when mention was made of three long-standing Vedic concepts integrated into this Upaniṣad. Therefore the dialogue this text brings to bear upon early sectarian art is less idiosyncratic than it is representative of conceptual continuities and developments within Vedic religious thought. A small proof can illustrate the point. This text, as indeed prior Vedic literature, has been quite silent on religious developments leading towards an understanding of the early multiplicity images of Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa, the Vṛṣṇi Vīras and Mahiṣāsura-mardinī. These deities are not deeply entrenched in Vedism. Therefore there is silence.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

THE BRIDGE FROM WORDS TO FORMS: MULTIPLICITY IN THE EPICS AND SELECTED DEVOTIONAL TEXTS

The epics' material pertaining to the multiplicity convention, especially the material in the Mahābhārata, reflects more than an accumulation or a synthesis of the Vedic position. In addition to bringing forward speculations aired in the Upaniṣads, the Mahābhārata presents notions, applicable to the convention, that will expand in the later Hindu classical systems of philosophy. In a tentative and sometimes ambiguous fashion, tenets of the Sāṃkhya system and the Yoga doctrine are already voiced in this epic. So too, notions that will resurface more fully in the Pāñcarātra system can be detected in their infancy in the Mahābhārata. In the same work, a god important in the Bhāgavata religion, in contradistinction to the Vedic religion, is attributed multiple bodily parts. Noteworthy too are the Mahābhārata's stray references to multiplicity which harmonize well with later Āgamic, as well as previous Upaniṣadic, thoughts. Clearly, the multiplicity convention is now connected with a wider and more complex array of ideologies than those described in the previous chapters. Before plunging into the epics' wealth of symbolic imagery – imagery that can elucidate the meaning of the convention in the art – it is good to cast a glance backward and summarize how far the Vedas have taken us in understanding the significance of this iconographic convention.

A

Summary

The Saṃhitās provide the critical orientation in the decipherment of the convention. Assigning multiple bodily parts and forms to a deity represents an Indo-Aryan mode of conceptualization which has reached remarkable consistency of expression already in the Rig Veda. I refer to the fact that this text, as well as the other Saṃhitās, employ the convention in three purposeful ways that may be considered three definitions of the multiplicity convention. All three definitions are framed around one image. The image is of a Power with multiple bodily parts or forms that creates by projecting forms out of itself. The multiplicity convention adheres, there is no doubt, to a cosmic creator. Remarkably, this general denotation of the convention remains constant throughout ancient Hinduism. The dominant multiplicity image in the Saṃhitās is that of the *viśvarūpa*-Power. *Viśvarūpa* is here consistently translated as "omniform" but the denotation of "viśva" is something more than "omni" or "all"; "sarva" means "all, total, complete". A god who is described as "viśvarūpa" is not described as "sarvarūpa". The particular force of *viśva* is that it emphasizes "the inability to proceed [further] after a certain total number has been

counted. . . .”¹ So the emphasis is on the total *number* of forms (i.e. *rūpa*-s) within a creator god; such a god is overwhelmingly male (*puruṣa*) in the Saṃhitās. In particular, there is the progenitor Puruṣa who creates along the lines of the biological model; he is a parturient god who gives birth to creation by expelling forms, just as a mother gives birth by ejecting the babe. Puruṣa is an androgynous giant surrounded by a plethora of limbs and bodily parts.

Being with “a thousand heads, a thousand eyes and a thousand feet”, symbolizes that this Male is composed of the total number of parts and forms available in the birth-giving process. The number “one thousand” corresponds to the meaning of “*viśva*”. Every form needed for creation is in the Cosmic Male, the Puruṣa of the Rig Vedic Puruṣasūkta. It is fair to say that this image of the omniform cosmic creator is retained not only in the Saṃhitās, but throughout the Vedas, and, as will be seen below, in the epic as well. The Saṃhitās consider Rudra, the forerunner of the Hindu god Śiva, a cosmic creator and bestow upon him exalted Vedic attributes. He is an asura, which may account for his awesome ambivalency. Rudra helps to perpetuate the Vedic sacrifice, and, he is recognized as being “multiformed” because he creates the cosmos.

Two extraordinary ideas, latent in the Saṃhitās, come to fruition in the Brāhmaṇas. The first is that the gigantic Cosmic Male can be a Pregnant Male. No problem or stigma is attached in the Brāhmaṇas to the Male who functions as a Female. Prajāpati, fully identified with the omniform Puruṣa of the Saṃhitās, is a motherly male who generates the world. Prajāpati, in one of the creation myths associated with him,² is endowed with a maternal physiognomy which includes a womb chamber filled with forms. The creator god in the guise of the Pregnant Male presages belief in “the womb of creation” which occurs in several Upaniṣadic figurative allusions. So too, the image of a Pregnant Male may well prepare the way for the later icon of the Yakṣa whose belly extends, and parenthetically, for the symbol of the pūrṇaghaṭa. The second noteworthy idea evident in the Brāhmaṇas is that numbers can be symbols for conceptualizations. The Brāhmaṇas make clear what the Saṃhitās imply, namely that numbers can represent “words” in addition to “quantities”. The texts reveal a symbolic language encoded in numbers. This symbolic language is capable of considerable conceptual refinements. Just as words represent specific concepts and can relate, as parts of speech, to other words, so can numbers display these properties. Again, Rudra gains in adjusting these Brāhmaṇic features unto his divine personage. The god is born from a golden vessel into which his father, Prajāpati, has poured the seed of the other gods. The symbolism is easy to grasp: Rudra arises from his father’s immortal womb chamber. He arises with a thousand eyes and feet, so, we may say he appears as the gigantic, omniform Cosmic Male, Puruṣa. Rudra’s omniform nature undergoes differentiation when he receives his eight names; they correlate with eight different forms. The symbolic values inhering in these names and in the

¹ On the significance of *viśva*-, see J. Gonda. “Reflections on Sarva – in Vedic Texts”. *Indian Linguistics* 16, Nov. 1955, 54.

² For a recent and somewhat problematic interpretation of the creativity of Prajāpati, see Brian K. Smith. *Reflections on Resemblance, Ritual and Religion*. New York, 1989, especially Chapter 3.

number "eight" indicate that Rudra is considered to be the preserver of the Vedic sacrifice as well as material existence. Knowledge about Viṣṇu also increases due to his association with the number "three" and all that it symbolizes. Viṣṇu's three strides, already alluded to in the Saṃhitās, continue to be mentioned. In addition, Viṣṇu becomes identified with the god Agni, whose divinity is so closely allied to triads. Thus, in addition to the notion of spacial expansiveness symbolic of Viṣṇu's three strides, evocations of triple forms, triple space, triple regions of divine manifestation, triple altars and triple fires can now be associated with Viṣṇu. This god, identified with the Vedic sacrifice, is equated with two omniform Powers, indicative that he too may be considered an omniform god; the Powers are the sacrificial Yūpa and Puruṣa-Prajāpati. The fact that both Viṣṇu and Rudra are associated with "being omniform" brings up a potentially important point regarding numerical symbolism. Just as the omniform concept (i.e. *viśvarūpa*-), is connected to both gods (directly to Rudra, indirectly to Viṣṇu), and it cannot be said to be more germane to one than the other, just so do numerical symbols operate. There is no reason to believe, for example, that the number "eight" is a Rudra number or that the number "three" is a "Viṣṇu number". Numbers, when used as "words" can operate in a variety of contexts without predicating that one context necessarily borrows from the other.

The Upaniṣads forsake neither the three definitions, the biological metaphor, nor the symbolic use of numbers, especially the significance of *viśvarūpa*, "the ultimate number of forms". Regarding the biological metaphor, a simile in the Aitareya Upaniṣad (II.4.2) opens a window unto the symbolic connection between the external parts and the internal forms. The passage indicates that the fetus (i.e. the Ātman as *garbha* in II.4.1) inside a woman is like a limb of her own. Thus the simile establishes a correspondence between a mother's internal form and her external limb. The comparison does open up the possibility that the multiple bodily forms inside a parturient Being can correspond to (or be symbolized by) his outer multiple bodily parts, or, vice versa, a Being's outward multiple bodily parts, could indicate that there are multiple forms inside of him. In the main then, the Upaniṣads add on to the previous concepts associated with the multiplicity convention, and in so doing, they fashion more subtle and more complex conceptualizations involving this convention. The early Upaniṣads ascribe the state of "*viśvarūpa*" to the lower form of the Supreme Brahman. New is the position of a Higher *and* a Lower Brahman, the latter being not only a projection out of the former but also the embodied form of the former, which is amorphous. The Higher, or transcendental Brahman, is regarded as "the full womb of creation". The Supreme, the Higher Brahman, is therefore a cosmic entity, still allied to a biological metaphor, but it is not really a Cosmic Person. Congealed form in the shape of a cosmic person shifts to the second, or lower form of Brahman, the omniform Person. Those concepts formerly attributed to an anthropomorphic divinity, now become attributes of the lower Brahman visualized as a Person: that is, the Person can be considered a Pregnant Male, and Puruṣa with his "thousand heads, eyes and feet". The later, theistic Upaniṣads, may be ambivalent as to whether the *viśvarūpa* nature ought to belong only to the lower form. Rudra, for example, is proclaimed as *viśvarūpa* whether he is equated with the transcendental, Higher or the

immanent, Lower Brahman. However, Nārāyaṇa, the Vedic god to become identified with Hinduistic Viṣṇu at some later stage, seems to be omniform only in the embodied (i.e. lower) form of Brahman in the Mahānārāyaṇa Upaniṣad; the Higher Brahman continues to be thought of as “The Womb” in the Mahānārāyaṇa Upaniṣad. Thus, the first thing to notice is that Rudra and Nārāyaṇa (i.e. deities antecedent to Śiva and Viṣṇu) are both personal gods who can be described as Viśvarūpa. The second and rather remarkable feature these gods share, in the theistic Upaniṣads analyzed, is that each one has an auspicious (*śiva*) nature, which ought to be quite different and distinct from each one’s omniform. A “*śivā tanū*” in the Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad is a manifest and gracious form; it is not subtle and fearsome like the omniform. The aspect of god that a devotee prays to see is the “*śivā tanū*” because it offers peace and protections. These details show that the two theistic Upaniṣads (the Śvetāśvatara and the Mahānārāyaṇa) usher in a threefold progression for the gods of future Hinduism: The progression begins with the Higher Brahman whence emanates the lower Brahman or Viśvarūpa, whence arises the manifest, auspicious form (or *śivā tanū*) of the personal god. The progression is not an anomaly; it is anticipated in the earlier Upaniṣads (even the Saṃhitās lead up to these ideas), and it is restated, although with reference to different terminology in the Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad. Herein the tripartite unfolding correlates facilely with the concepts of the preceding progression as well as with forms seen in later *śaivite* iconography. The ultimate source in the Śvetāśvatara is called *yonī*, a term which also signifies “the womb”. It is therefore easy to connect the concept “*yonī*” with “the full womb of creation” which is the Higher Brahman. From the “*yonī*” emerges a subtle form called a *liṅga*, and from it proceeds the third unfolding, namely *mūrti*, or the created, solid [and therefore manifest] form. As such, there is postulated a second unfolding, “*liṅga*”, which is neither solid nor transcendental, but subtle in nature; it reminds of the nature of the Lower Brahman. The third unfolding, “*mūrti*”, is rather reminiscent of the manifest body of the personal god. Indeed, it is intimated in the Mahānārāyaṇa Upaniṣad that the subtle, or *liṅga*, body emits the first part (i.e. *mukha*) of what is to become the visible *mūrti*, and that this evolving form is fivefold (probably, five headed) when the process involves Rudra-Śiva. The Upaniṣads do not tell us whether the solid manifestations of Rudra and Nārāyaṇa have multiple bodily parts. For that sort of information we must await the descriptions in the Mahābhārata.

Vedic means for understanding the multiplicity convention stop here. But before passing on to the epics, it must be registered how far the Vedas contribute towards answering the six questions outlined in Chapter 1 (p. 20), questions that aim at decoding the meaning of early icons having the multiplicity convention. The Vedas demonstrate that there is a general denotation for the convention based on a biological metaphor; (incidentally, the denotation, even as it develops in complexity, can continue to work, due to the prevailing cosmography in the Vedas.) Next, the texts allow that the general denotation can be applied to two of the three major deities in Hinduism whose early icons show the convention (i.e. Rudra-Śiva and Viṣṇu). The Vedas often describe a particular image which will become an icon having multiple bodily parts and forms; this is the Viśvarūpa icon. Lastly these texts introduce the idea of a symbolic language pertaining

to numbers. The fact, of course, that the Vedas can show – in connection with the above factors – the rise of Rudra and Viṣṇu, whose images will be adorned with the multiplicity convention, strengthens the appropriateness for interpreting their images by means of the Vedic information.

The Vedas do not explain why specific limbs or bodily parts are multiplied. Of the many limbs and organs multiplied in the Saṃhitās, for example, there is no indication why just a few of these come to be used in the later iconography. The Viśvarūpa descriptions hint, but they are not conclusive on this problem. The organs and parts that are important in Upaniṣadic speculations, such as the heart and the veins, do not become important in the iconography of the multiplicity convention. The one organ often mentioned in the Vedas that does enter into art, but is neither multiplied nor associated with the multiplicity images of the above two gods and the goddess (the Devī; see Chapter 20), is the womb.

The gap concerning the specific limbs or bodily parts chosen for multiplication is somewhat closed by the Mahābhārata. The same text also suggests the general symbolism associated with those bodily parts that receive multiplication. This epic is a veritable bridge. It elaborates upon the theology of divine unfolding explored in previous Vedic texts, and it elaborates on divine manifestations on earth. It also contains descriptions that are actualized in images. These descriptions, often incorporating new theological and philosophical positions, are particularly useful since the Mahābhārata overlaps in time with the dates assigned to the earliest Hindu icons having the multiplicity convention. The Rāmāyaṇa is considerably less useful for our purposes. It, together with purāṇic material, have been used here more as ancillary documentation on information gathered from the Mahābhārata.

B

Towards an understanding of early Vaiṣṇava images with the multiplicity convention

The Bhagavad Gītā, Book VI of the Mahābhārata, is the best single source for understanding *vaiṣṇava* multiplicity images in the early art. The Gītā provides the paradigm; other epic and bhakti passages add to it. The paradigm involves three divine forms. We may call it the tripartite somatology of a personal god. The Gītā's paradigm reflects a continuum with Upaniṣadic thought as well as the introduction of proto-Sāṃkhyan thought, and both are allied to explain the nature of a personal god who reigns supreme. God has a higher form which he reveals to be his Viśvarūpa form. He has a lower form, immanent in the world, which is an eightfold form. He has an earthly form which is a four-armed form. In this way, each divine form is associated with multiple bodily parts. And, each literary form can be correlated with a concrete image having the appropriate number of multiple bodily parts.

The god of the Bhagavad Gītā is Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa, main deity of the Bhāgavata religion. Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa is not yet subsumed within Vaiṣṇavism. He is the Gītā's supreme god who chooses to descend to earth and take on a manifest form. As such, the divine

unfolding described in the Gītā ought not be viewed as an example of the belief that Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa is an avatāra of the god Viṣṇu.³ Indeed, the four-armed image of descent described in the Gītā and the corresponding actual image are conceptually distinct from the Kuṣāṇa forms of Viṣṇu.⁴ However, the process leading towards subsumption is underway: both the Gītā and the art at Mathurā bear witness to an on-going process wherein the Bhāgavata god becomes fully identified with Viṣṇu.⁵ Śrī Bhagavān, the god we meet in the Gītā, inherits characteristics from Upaniṣadic Brahman;⁶ he is not yet a godhead within Vaiṣṇavism.

The Viśvarūpa image in the Gītā is an epiphany, and other epic passages agree. A Viśvarūpa image of god is therefore not an image readily accessible to the devotee who worships the god. Arjuna is such a devotee. He must receive special sight to behold god in his supernal form. "I wish to see your supernal form" exclaims Arjuna.⁷ Thereupon Śrī Bhagavān gives Arjuna a divine eye (*divya-cakṣus*). This eye allows Arjuna "to see" god's supernal form; the obvious implication is that his ordinary eyes (*svacakṣus*) cannot behold the extra-ordinary. Arjuna is now prepared to take in the epiphany.

God showed (*vdṛś*) Arjuna his highest supernal form (*paramaṁ rūpaṁ aiśvaram*, Bh.G. 11.9), having many mouths and eyes, exhibiting many marvels, wearing divine ornaments, and holding high many divine weapons . . . god was infinite, having faces in every direction (Bh.G. 11.9–12). "I see" said Arjuna, "your endless form filling the expanse, with many arms, bellies, mouths, eyes; no end, nor middle, not even your beginning do I see, O Universal Omniform Lord" (*visveśvara viśvarūpa*; Bh.G. 11.16).

The vision produces fear in Arjuna. "Having seen your dreadful (*ugra*) and wondrous (*adbhuta*) form (*rūpa*), the three worlds shudder, Mahātma" (Bh.G. 11.20). "At the sight of your vastness with its eyes and mouths, many arms, thighs, bellies and feet . . . the worlds are in panic and so am I" (Bh.G. 11.23). Even seeing your mouths with terrible tusks resembling fire at the end of a world eon. I know no direction [to flee] and find no shelter; have mercy, Lord of gods, you in whom the living dwell (Bh.G. 11.25).

Arjuna calls the Viśvarūpa vision of god a dreadful [or powerful, terrific etc.] form (*ugrarūpa*; Bh.G. 11.13; cf. *supra*). He cannot bear to see for long this blazing sight of all possible number of bodily parts. The shape of Viśvarūpa in the Gītā does not stray far from the Vedic descriptions of the omniform; indeed, the shape harks back directly to descriptions in the Rig Veda which are applied to both the cosmic Puruṣa (in 10.90.1) and the cosmic Viśvakarman (in 10.82.3–5). And, like the Vedic antecedents, the Gītā's Viśvarūpa is a cosmic creator, addressed by Arjuna as "Lord of gods, you in whom the living dwell". The entire Brāhmaṇic tradition – Vedas and epic – unites in designating the form of the creator god as a gigantic Male radiating with the total number of bodily

³ *The Bhagavadgītā in the Mahābhārata*. Text and Translation by J.A.B. van Buitenen, Chicago, 1981, p. 28. On related issues, see also Chapter 18.

⁴ Compare discussion in Chapter 18.

⁵ For convenience we may say that the Gītā gives us insight into *vaiṣṇava* imagery.

⁶ Franklin Edgerton states, and I agree, that the notions connected with "the Upaniṣadic Brahman contributed largely to the Gītā's notion of God . . ." (*The Bhagavad Gītā*, Harper Torchbooks, New York, 1964, p. 150).

⁷ *Draṣṭum icchāmi te rūpaṁ aiśvaram*: Bh.G. 11.3.

parts on his exterior and containing, in his interior, the material forms to inhabit the world. Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa tells Arjuna that this is his supreme form (*rūpam param* Bh.G. 11.47). Does that mean that Viśvarūpa represents the Highest? Yes – according to what Kṛṣṇa says in the above verse as well as in other passages (i.e. Bh.G. 11.9 *supra*). No – according to what Kṛṣṇa says in Bh.G. 14.3: “My womb (*yoni*) is the large Brahman (neut.); in It I plant the fetus (*garbha*). Thence the origin of all beings. . . .” (So also 14.4).

The Gītā can be ambivalent on the relationship between the personal god and the impersonal Brahman. God in the Gītā can indeed be the Supreme, higher than Brahman whose characteristics he adopts. As such, an epiphany of Viśvarūpa represents the revelation of the transcendental god. But Kṛṣṇa can also be the fecundating god subordinate to the Womb of Creation which is Brahman (Bh.G. 14.3, *supra*). This image is cast into a familiar Upaniṣadic mold wherein the Womb, or the Plenum is the Higher Brahman and god, the Creator is the Lower Brahman.⁸ From this perspective, the epiphany of Viśvarūpa would represent the first apprehensible form of that which is essentially form-less and transcendental. This position of Viśvarūpa tends to be corroborated by the choice of terminology describing the epiphany. I consider terms such as *ugra* and *ugrarūpa* to be somewhat unlikely choices for the revelation of the Highest Transcendental Power.⁹ However, this is speculation. And since the Gītā does not ask for resolutions on the position of god vis-à-vis the Upaniṣadic Brahman, there is no need to insist on only one theological position for the epiphany of god’s highest form, Viśvarūpa.

The vision of Viśvarūpa given to Arjuna is not the first occurrence of god’s epiphany in the epic. Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa shows his real form (*vapus- svaka-* 5.129.16) to Duryodhana and his entourage before showing himself to Arjuna. In order to point out the folly of the Kauravas who think that Kṛṣṇa is just one man on the side of the Pāṇḍavas, he tells the group that “in this very spot stand all the Pāṇḍavas, the Andhakas and the Vṛṣṇis, here the Ādityas, Rudras, Vasus and the great seers”.¹⁰ Then a miracle transpires. Thirty gods sprang thumb-size from his body and hovered about him like a blazing aureole. Many of god’s attributes – the conch, the discus, the mace, spear, the horn bow, the plough, the Nandaka sword – became visible. All sorts of weapons, which glowed, were held in Kṛṣṇa’s many hands. In this instance, the Viśvarūpa image reveals that inside of god’s body are a host of bodies. Divinities, tribes and seers, especially those in opposition to the Kauravas, spring from Kṛṣṇa’s body. Kṛṣṇa’s own body has many arms. The text says that the World Guardians appear on his four arms (5.129.5), but he ought to have more than four arms to carry the various attributes and weapons that are also mentioned. (In the art, it is usual to have no more than one emblem in a hand.) This epiphany too is deemed terrific (*ghora*) and only those who received from god a divine eye (*divya-cakṣus-*, 5.129.13) can bear to see it.

⁸ See Chapters 8, pp. 87ff.; and 9, pp. 98ff.

⁹ Note for example that Śiva’s Viśvarūpa form is later classified in iconographic texts as a Bhairava form which I understand to be lower than the form of the undifferentiated Liṅga. Cf. T.A. Gopinath Rao, *Elements of Hindu Iconography*, Vol. II, Pt. 1, 2nd edition. Varanasi 1971, p. 180.

¹⁰ 5.129.3; *The Mahābhārata*, Book 4 and Book 5, transl. and edited by J.A.B. van Buitenen, Chicago, 1978, p. 129.

The Mahābhārata contains another revelation of Viśvarūpa, but it belongs to the god Nārāyaṇa, not Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa, and it looks somewhat different than the epiphanies of the latter god. This Viśvarūpa epiphany is witnessed by the sage Nārada on the distant White Island (12.326.1). Nārāyaṇa's Viśvarūpa form has variegated hues and a profusion of multiple bodily parts. He has a thousand eyes, a hundred heads, a thousand feet, a thousand bellies and arms (12.326.6, 7), and many mouths (see 12.326.8). In his many hands he holds attributes symbolic of the Brāhmaṇic ascetic: the sacrificial altar, the ascetic's water jar, *darbha* grasses, some gems and precious stones, an antelope skin, the wooden staff and a blazing fire for oblation (12.326.9). Nārāyaṇa calls this form his *viśvamūrti* (i.e. the manifestation of all his forms; 12.326.14). That name should alert us to the fact that *viśva* is still the conceptual equivalent of "a thousand" [as the last number of multiple bodily parts]; there is also strong indication that conceptually "one thousand" and "one hundred" mean the same thing (i.e. "omni"), when applied to a bodily part.¹¹ This passage shows, just as the Gītā passage cited above, that neither the conceptual usage of numbers, nor the symbolic value of specific numbers, nor the overall notion inhering in Viśvarūpa have changed much since the Saṃhitās and Brāhmaṇas.

Nārāyaṇa in his Viśvamūrti form discloses his quadruple manifestation (*mūrticatur*; 12.326.43) to Nārada; the disclosure anticipates the *caturvyūha* doctrine of the Pāñcarātras (cf. also MhBh. 12.321.8).

Nārāyaṇa also makes known the *avatāra*-s dwelling inside of him. Then he disappears. Nārada goes on to teach these mysteries which are called a great upaniṣad, in accordance with the four Vedas, in harmony with Sāṃkhya-yoga, and are spoken of as the Pāñcarātra doctrine (12.326.100).

Another epiphany described in the Āśvamedha Parvan is specified as a *vaiṣṇava* form (see 14.54.4). If the revealed supernal form (*rūpamaiśvaram* in 14.54.3) were that of Nārāyaṇa or Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa, I, for one, do wonder why the text would not say so. A glimpse into the on-going process of amalgamating the different religious strands into the personage of Hinduistic Viṣṇu may be at work here. There is another fascinating aspect to this description; the nature of Viśvarūpa is conveyed by elaborating on the cosmic vastness of the form rather than on the total number of its bodies and parts. With his two feet, he covers the earth. With his head he fills the sky. With his belly (*jathara*) he fills the intervening space. With his two arms he fills the horizontal space (lit. "spacial directions"; *āśas*). Viśvarūpa's arms are [exceedingly?] long (*mahābhujā*).¹² This image of Viśvarūpa evokes the huge spacial dimensions of Cosmic or Mahā Puruṣa and it keeps current an upaniṣadic option, namely god's omniform nature can be expressed by its colossal size (symptomatic of cosmic fullness), as well as by the multiplicity convention.

Looking at all the epic passages, we can do more than observe that the Viśvarūpa images follow models established in the Vedas. Multiplication of divine bodily parts occurs in three compartments of the divine body. There is multiplication of the upper part

¹¹ On other conceptual relationships between 100 and 1000, see Chapter 6, p. 74 and fn. 70.

¹² See the critical edition of MhBh. 14.54, fn. 5, p. 208 for further descriptions of this form in some of the recensions.

(heads, eyes, mouths). There is multiplication of the lower part (feet, thighs). And, there is multiplication of the part in between. If we labeled this part as the torso, an important idiosyncrasy would be lost. The mid-region is a cavity; terms like *udara*, *jāthara*, signifying “belly” suggest that the mid-region is a container, and that the overarching image of the Pregnant Male is still viable.

Another point to emphasize is that a different sort of multiplication occurs in these compartments. Bodily parts (limbs, organs etc.) are multiplied in the upper and lower compartments of the divine body. But, the mid-region is filled with a multiplicity of completed forms. The mid-region still acts as the womb. It holds the bodies of gods, avatāras tribesmen, seers etc. and at the proper time god emits these living forms into the world. There is, assuredly, a connection between Viśvarūpa’s multiple outer parts and multiple inner bodies. The link has been caught sight of in the Aitareya Upaniṣad (*supra*). God is he “in whom the living dwell”, to quote Arjuna. His outer multiple parts bespeak of the living fruit within.

The epic’s imagery of Viśvarūpa is a literary parting gesture before the advent of Viśvarūpa images in Hindu art. The imagery helps bridge the transition from ideology to iconography. The literature prepares us to expect certain iconographic features. We can be quite sure that a Viśvarūpa image does not require a specific number of parts or forms. All indications, from the Vedas through the epic, suggest the lack of mathematical numbers with Viśvarūpa’s multiple parts. Both *viśva-*, and its numerical equivalent “one thousand” signify “total number” without assigning a mathematical quantity to that number. Therefore actual numbers of multiple bodily parts seem to be open to interpretation in a Viśvarūpa image. “The total number” – of “arms”, “heads”, “feet” etc. – could be determined by what number is technically possible for the given artist, or the given space. We ought therefore to be prepared to accept that different images can use different mathematical numbers in this type of image. One stipulation needs to be adhered to; it is that a Viśvarūpa image must show the multiplication of several parts and/or forms. An image, for example, that only multiplies one organ or limb etc., no matter to what degree, cannot qualify as a Viśvarūpa image. Lastly, we may expect to find Viśvarūpa images that are devoid of any multiplicity, but render, instead, the divinity as a colossus to suggest creativity due to largeness. These stipulations do not exhaust the iconographic possibilities that an early Viśvarūpa image may have. They do summarize the textual stipulations prior to the advent of the images. Iconographic treatises and purāṇic descriptions, it must be remembered, come after the fact. They come *way after the fact*, given my working hypothesis, that religious iconography is built upon considerable familiarity with an efficacious religious idea attained during a long prior period.

In general, early Viśvarūpa images reflect quite well the literary stipulations. “Early” with respect to this divine form means the Gupta and post-Gupta periods.¹³ I will concentrate on the Gaḍhwā and Śāmalājī Viśvarūpas, which are early and sufficiently intact, and try

¹³ I cannot agree that the nomenclature “Viśvarūpa” in the technical sense explored above can be profitably applied to the images in Plates 1–47 in T.S. Maxwell, *Viśvarūpa*, Delhi, 1988.

to show the extent of agreement between them and the literature. Right from the beginning, there appear to be two types of Viśvarūpas: one is the standing type (Gaḍhwā; 5th century), the other is the crouching type (Śāmalājī; 6th century). They have been amply described in several publications, and therefore need not be again fully described here.¹⁴

Viśvarūpa depicted on the right end of the Gaḍhwā lintel is a *vaiṣṇava* image because the god wears a long *vanamālā* wreath.¹⁵ The figure has six arms and three visible heads (a boar and a lion are the lateral faces and possibly a horse is the central face); a fourth bust seems to come out of the central head. The figure is quite corroded and therefore uncertainties exist. Behind the god's multiple heads is an aureole of human heads.

Perhaps these represent the heads of the living coming out of the creator. Flames envelop the outer part of Viśvarūpa and bring to mind the blazing sight which Arjuna beholds. This small and early representation of Viśvarūpa displays the following features gleaned from the literature: There is multiplication of two bodily parts of god (arms and heads).¹⁶ The myriad beings born from Viśvarūpa seem to be represented here only by their heads. The epic's descriptions of the living emitted by Viśvarūpa make us expect to see complete forms. So this rendition of heads (if indeed they represent life emitted by Viśvarūpa), is an abbreviated rendering of that idea. Two fifth century Mathurā fragments of Viśvarūpa, show more of the living forms being emitted. In these fragments, the host (comprising heavenly beings, *śaiva* divinities and ascetics), are again depicted within a halo; the larger fragment from Bhankari shows how the halo surrounds the upper part of Viśvarūpa who has four arms and the lateral boar and lion heads (to left and right respectively).¹⁷

The three Viśvarūpa sculptures from Śāmalājī, Gujarat, are quite similar in their iconography. The icons, dating to the sixth century,¹⁸ are the Desai Viśvarūpa now in the National Museum, the Viśrāmaghāt Viśvarūpa at Śāmalājī, and the Baroda Museum and Picture Gallery Viśvarūpa. Each image features the god with three visible heads and eight arms. He is in a crouching position and a profusion of forms radiate like a huge halo around the upper part of the god.¹⁹ So it can be said that each icon has multiple divine forms emanating from the creator and hovering about him, as well as the multiple bodily parts of the creator himself. The multiple forms coming out of the creator are not

¹⁴ See fn. 15 for details on the Gaḍhwā relief; Maxwell (see fn. 13) describes both; Cf. Joanna Gottfried Williams, *The Art of Gupta India, Empire and Province*, Princeton, 1982; Sara L. Schastok, *The Śāmalājī Sculptures and 6th Century Art in Western India*, Leiden 1985; U.P. Shah, "Sculptures from Śāmalājī and Roda", *Bulletin of the Baroda Museum and Picture Gallery*, 13, 1960.

¹⁵ J.C. Harle, *Gupta Sculpture*, Oxford, 1974, p. 47. See the illustration of the lintel in Figs. 71-73. For a complete description, see p. 47. Cf. N.P. Joshi, *Catalogue of the Brahmanical Sculptures in the State Museum, Lucknow* (Part I), Lucknow, 1972, pp. 85-88.

¹⁶ For a discussion of the Viśvarūpa image within the Pāñcarātra theology, and the symbolism of the horse's head together with the boar and lion heads, see D.M. Srinivasan, with L. Sander, "Viśvarūpa, Vyūha, Avatāra: Reappraisals based on an Inscribed Bronze from the Northwest dated to the early 5th Century A.D." *East and West* in Press.

¹⁷ See Pls. 74 and 75 in Williams, *Gupta India*.

¹⁸ The dating follows that of Schastok, *Śāmalājī Sculptures*, see p. 125 etc.

¹⁹ On the identification of the personages emanating from the Viśvarūpas, see Maxwell, *Viśvarūpa*, Chapter III.

visually associated with his mid region. Still the idea that god is "birthing" these forms is conveyed. How? The posture (*āsana*) of the Śāmalājī Viśvarūpas is the birth-giving posture. The god, in each of these three reliefs does not assume an ordinary sitting pose nor a yoga-related pose; compare, for example, the *āsana* of the Viśrāmaghāt Viśvarūpa (Pl. 11.1) with the seated postures of Viṣṇu, Śiva and the Goddess in pre-Kuṣāṇa, Kuṣāṇa and Gupta reliefs (Pls. 17.11; 19.11; 19.14; 20.10). The low squat evident in the Viśrāmaghāt Viśvarūpa is not associated with these deities. Viśvarūpa stretches open his legs; the knees are splayed wide apart, but the ankles come more together. The pose is reminiscent of the pose assumed by a variety of birth-giving godlings. Divine Mothers in Kuṣāṇa art sit like this. Hārītī, seated beside Kuvera in a Kuṣāṇa statuette in the Mathura Museum, has poised her legs quite similarly (Pl. 11.2). Moreover, to emphasize her maternal powers, a babe is perched on her left thigh.²⁰ The same two features, babe and low squat, are seen in the Hārītī relief (Pl. 14.19) whose plastic expressions of maternity ultimately connect with female ritual vessels, especially (what I call) "mother pots" of much earlier B.C. periods (see Pl. 14.18). Ancient mother pots not only interface with Hārītī's maternal iconography but also with other expressions of parturient iconography, such as the Birth-Giving Goddess whose womb is a pot (see Pl. 15.19).²¹ So, the first thing to notice is that Viśvarūpa's crouching position is quite the same as the position of females that have or can give birth. Indeed, today the Viśrāmaghāt Viśvarūpa is worshipped as a Mother Goddess.²² The second thing to keep in mind is that we are in a tradition that can envision the creator as the Pregnant Male, so we should be prepared to see parturient iconography applied to males. The Kumbhodara Yakṣa (the Yakṣa whose pregnant belly is like a water pot) is one such parturient male. His swollen belly can cause his legs to swing wide open. Pertinent to our discussion of the sixth century Śāmalājī Viśvarūpa images is that this type of Kumbhodara Yakṣa is still a viable minor god in Northern India during the sixth/seventh century (see Pl. 15.7).²³ The Śāmalājī Viśvarūpa images therefore portray a motherly god; his crouch implies that the overhead mass of forms has been ejected from his middle. This overhead mass is much larger and denser than the lower segment of the relief, resulting in an imbalance of volumes. A subtle downward thrust upon the open, splayed knees of Viśvarūpa is created. This thrust plus the weight of the upper torso with god's multiple heads and arms all push downward in the direction of the groins. The downward push of all these sculptural volumes suggests the exertion used in giving birth.

A word about the actual number of heads and arms on these Śāmalājī icons. The

²⁰ The pose is specified as *bhadrāsana* and is routinely associated with Mother Goddesses through the ages. See N.P. Joshi, *Mātrkāṣ, Mothers in Kuṣāṇa Art*, New Delhi, 1986 p. 129 and plates, Om Prakas Misra cites a medieval example from Agra in his *Iconography of the Saptamātrikas*, Delhi, 1989, p. 130. Cf. J. LeRoy Davidson, *Art of the Indian Subcontinent from Los Angeles Collections*, Los Angeles, 1968, No. 11.

²¹ See Chapter 14, p. 192 and Chapter 15, pp. 202–203.

²² Oral communication of Sara Schastok following the discussion on my paper "The Pregnant Male" at the 1994 ACSAA Symposium, April 22nd, New York City.

²³ In the same vein, the Birth-Giving Goddess whose womb is a pot has visual heirs of the 6th–7th century, some of which can be found in Gujarat (place of the Śāmalājī icons). See Carol Radcliffe Bolon, *Forms of the Goddess Lajjā Gaurī in Indian Art*, University Park, 1992: see Nos. 65, 69, 71, 81, 82, 83, 84, 86, 87, 88, 89, 90.

numbers illustrate what the early texts suggest, namely that no specific number is mandatory. All the three Viśvarūpa icons show three visible anthropomorphic heads. Yet it is not clear to me whether the god is indeed three-headed, much like Agni who is subsumed into Viṣṇu,²⁴ or whether the god is four-headed as the Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa prescribes for Viśvarūpa images.²⁵ Or, as I suspect, in this early stage one exclusive number is not mandatory and both number of heads are a possibility. As for the arms, the Śāmalājī images are eight armed. But I would not like to embark on the significance of “eight” in relation to this icon because we should not forget that the Gaḍhwā Viśvarūpa has six arms. Does one number represent more accurately the symbolism for this type of image than the other number? The findings from the whole prior textual tradition make me doubt this. Happily, the later Viṣṇudharmottara confirms this doubt by stating that a Viśvarūpa form “should have as many hands as the artist can make. . . .”²⁶ Critical for the iconography of a Viśvarūpa image is the intensification of multiplied bodily parts and forms. I submit therefore that “the ultimate number of bodily parts and forms” are conveyed in these omniform representations from Śāmalājī via three (? four) heads + eight arms + a mass of ejected forms. That is, the aggregate of these parts and forms is the mental equivalent of a) the number 1,000 and b) the concept *viśva-* or omni.

The Śāmalājī Viśvarūpa icons differ rather considerably in size although none is a colossus.²⁷ Colossal size, it will be remembered is another way of alluding to the notion of the omniform creator in the literature. The epic includes this conceptualization and paints for us the extraordinary image of a god whose feet touch the earth, whose head fills the sky and whose belly fills the intervening atmosphere. What the artists of the Śāmalājī Viśvarūpas have done is to carve out, by way of symbols, a rather analogous space. Taking once again the Viśrāmaghāṭ image as our example, it is clear that the god’s feet rest upon semi-anthropomorphic serpents (*nāgas*), evocative of the waters. On either side stand two pairs of human figures (possibly representing the *ayudha-puruṣas*);²⁸ they stand on firm ground. The atmospheric expanse is symbolized by the *vidhyādhara*s flying from either side of the god’s lateral faces.²⁹ The heavenly sphere is demarcated by the heavenly beings clustered about the upper reaches of Viśvarūpa’s triple crown. Here then is a way of implying the utter vastness (or the Mahā Puruṣa quality) of Viśvarūpa

²⁴ On the three forms of Agni see Chapter 2, p. 30 and Chapter 4 indicates that in the Yajur Veda Agni continues to have “three bodies” and “three tongues”. It is not necessary to mention – and in the same breath disclaim – a connection between these *vaiṣṇava* Viśvarūpa images and the Rig Vedic demonic and three-headed (*triśiras*) Viśvarūpa (see Chapter 2, fn. 2). Maxwell suggests a connection in “Transformational Aspects of Hindu Myth and Iconology: Viśvarūpa”, *AARP* 4, London 1973. A succinct response has been already given by Ratan Parimoo, “Some Thoughts on the Sculptures of Visvarupa Visnu” in *Vaiṣṇavism in Indian Arts and Culture* ed. by Ratan Parimoo, New Delhi, 1987. Parimoo says, “The fact that Triśiras was tricephalic does not explain the feature of the multiple heads. Multi-headed aspects of Indian deities is a larger phenomenon and cannot be explained just by giving examples of mythic characters” (p. 356).

²⁵ See Third Khaṇḍa, Adhyāya 83.

²⁶ P. Shah, *Viṣṇudharmottara-Purāṇa*. Third Khaṇḍa, Vol. II. Baroda, 1961, p. 162.

²⁷ The Desai Viśvarūpa is 142 cms. (i.e. circa 56"); the Viśrāmaghāṭ image is about 102 cms. (i.e. circa 40"), and the Baroda Museum image is about 90 cms. (i.e. circa 35").

²⁸ See Schastok, *Śāmalājī Sculptures*, pp. 20–21.

²⁹ See Fig. 3.1 in Maxwell, *Viśvarūpa*, p. 148.

without the problem of translating this complex imagery into physically staggering proportions.

The last point may offer a clue to a most important question. "Why were there no multiplicity icons of Viśvarūpa until the Gupta and post-Gupta periods if the concept is truly a pervasive one throughout Vedic and Brahmanic literature?"³⁰ There is no certain answer, but there are provocative possible answers. A Viśvarūpa displaying multiplication of parts and forms is a grande sculptural production. I do not think it is a coincidence that the earliest known example (to date) is in a relief format and that only in the post-Gupta age were free-standing Viśvarūpas attempted. As noted above, the enormously complex iconography of the free-standing forms was executed on a scale that may well have been purposely kept manageable. Thus, one possible answer is that execution of this form may have been just too technically difficult during the early phases of Hindu art. Perhaps there is also a religious dimension to the answer. The earliest Viśvarūpa images are of Viṣṇu-Nārāyaṇa while the epic images are associated with Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa, Nārāyaṇa and a *vaiṣṇava* deity, not further specified. Possibly it is again a question of sufficient time for the strands to jell into a cohesive Hindu expression. Finally, it must be remembered that an early Viśvarūpa icon was, of course, fashioned: the colossus of Nārāyaṇa in the guise of Mahā Puruṣa is an expression of the Viśvarūpa notion without the introduction of the multiplication of parts and forms (see Pls. 18.7 & 8). The existence of this image – a colossus on the model of a "normal" male – tends to corroborate the other suppositions just proposed. The Nārāyaṇa image is free standing, large, but devoid of both complex iconography and the intensification of the multiplicity convention. Further, it represents one of the strands to merge subsequently into Hinduistic Viṣṇu. Therefore, the most conservative but possibly best answer to the initial question is that as soon as theology and technology were ready, the more complex iconography of the multiform creator was captured in stone.

In a section of the Gītā preceding the celebrated epiphany of god's Viśvarūpa form, Śrī Bhagavān defines himself to Arjuna by alluding to his lower nature and his higher nature:

My material nature [*prakṛti*] is eightfold [*aṣṭadhā*], comprising the order of earth, water, fire, wind, ether, mind [*manas*], spirit [*buddhi*] and ego [*ahaṁkāra*]. This is my lower nature [*aparā*], but know that I have another, higher nature [*prakṛti parā*], which comprises the order of souls [*jīva bhūtā*]: it is by the latter that this world is sustained . . .³¹

³⁰ It might be that a late Kuṣāṇa fragment in the Bharat Kala Bhavan (Acc. no. 152) was part of a Viśvarūpa image. The fragment shows six vertical rows of figures some of which appear to be "vaiṣṇava". The latter remind R.C. Agrawala, who first described the spotted red sandstone piece, as being similar to the *vaiṣṇava* figures on the Nand Liṅga (see R.C. Agrawala, "Brahmanical Sculptures from Bharat Kala Bhavan" *Chhavi* I, Benaras, 1971, p. 173). Since not enough remains on the Bharat Kala Bhavan fragment to compare it to known Viśvarūpa images, its identification is somewhat uncertain. However, if one were not bothered by caution and wanted to identify it as such (see P.K. Agrawala, "Iconoplastic Beginnings of Multi-Headed and Multi-Armed Images at Mathurā", *JISOA* N.S. Vol. XV, 1985–1986, 21–28), then I do believe it should be stated why the image is taken to be a *vaiṣṇava* and not a *śaiva* Viśvarūpa.

³¹ van Buitenen, *Bhagavadgītā*, pp. 28 and 99, re: 7.4–5.

Śrī Kṛṣṇa again refers to a higher and a lower state of the divine in Bh.G. 8.20. He calls attention here to an eternal unmanifest (*avyakta- sanātana-*) which is beyond the unmanifest (*avyaktāt*). The higher nature is god's final location (*dhāman*) of divine power; it is the Supreme Puruṣa (*puruṣa- para-*) according to Bh.G. 8.21 and 22. The lower, according to the above verses (in 7.4–5), represents materiality in its unevolved or germinal eightfold state. Kṛṣṇa calls this his eightfold material nature (*Aṣṭadhā Prakṛti*). The Gītā does not explicitly state how the Eightfold Material Nature of god relates to his Viśvarūpa form. I am assuming that the Viśvarūpa nature of god has more in common with his higher nature than his lower nature. Therefore the Eightfold Nature that Kṛṣṇa mentions here is assumed to be below his Viśvarūpa nature.

Belief in an unevolved, eightfold materiality (*Aṣṭadhā Prakṛti*), is part of a larger theory of origination developed within Sāṃkhya speculative thought. The Mahābhārata, especially the Bhagavad Gītā and the Mokṣadharma (Book 12. Chapters 168–353) provides valuable insight into proto-Sāṃkhya beliefs, that is, beliefs prior to the formulation of the classical system.³² Bhagavad Gītā 13.5, in describing “the Sāṃkhyan view of the psycho-physical entity of the body”,³³ mentions among others, *avyakta* (the unmanifest i.e. *Prakṛti*), *buddhi*, *Ahaṃkāra* and the great elements or *mahābhūtāni*. The *mahābhūtāni* are itemized in Mhbh. 12.187.4 as the following: earth water, fire wind and ether.³⁴ These are, of course, the same five great elements forming part of Kṛṣṇa's eightfold material nature. The eightfold *Prakṛti* described in two passages of the Mokṣadharma (12.294.27ff. and 12.298.10ff.) includes the *avyakta*, or unmanifest *Prakṛti*, *buddhi*, *ahaṃkāra*, and the same five great elements. Mhbh. 12.298.12–13 continues to cite the modifications that evolve from the unevolved eightfold materiality. The passage is quoted below since it sheds light on Sāṃkhya classification of certain bodily parts:

These are the eight (productive) material principles. But hear from me the modifications too: (the five sense-organs) hearing (ear), skin (touch), and eye (sight), tongue (taste) and nose (smell) as the fifth;

(Their objects) sound, contact, and form, tastes (things tasted), and odour too; speech, the hands and feet, the anus and the generative organ likewise (the five organs of action).³⁵

Of interest in the proto-Sāṃkhyan series of evolutes is that hands and feet are classified as limbs of action. Specifically the passage refers to two hands and two feet. The same inclusion of “two hands and two feet” among the limbs (or organs) of action, is cited in other proto-Sāṃkhya passages (e.g. 12.203.28; 14.42.13–15) in the epic. Of course, “hands” can be taken as synecdoche for “arms”, to the effect that proto-Sāṃkhyan thought associates the normal number of arms as limbs of (and for) presumably normal action. Is it too bold to find in this association a connotation for more than the normal number of

³² G. Larson, *Classical Sāṃkhya*, 2nd rev. ed., Delhi, 1979, p. 108; Michel Hulin, *Sāṃkhya Literature*, Vol. VI, Fasc. 3 in *A History of Indian Literature*, Wiesbaden, 1978, p. 132.

³³ van Buitenen, *Bhagavadgītā*, p. 168, 35 [13], fn. 4.

³⁴ See also 12.239.3.

³⁵ Franklin Edgerton, *Beginnings of Indian Philosophy*, London 1965, p. 323.

arms? Could it be that a supra-normal number of arms is meant to carry out supra-normal action? A correlation between arms and action is already introduced in the Vedas. When we read, in the *Puruṣasūkta* (RV 10.90.12) that the *Rājanya* come from the arms of *Puruṣa* [whereas the *Brāhmaṇa* come from his head or mouth, the *Vaiśya* from his thighs and the *Śūdra* from his feet] a correlation is made between the fighting and ruling class and the limbs of the body engaged in vigorous, physical activity. This correlation is underscored in the passage from the *Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa* I. 68, 69 cited in Chapter 6; herein *Prajāpati*, now identified with *Puruṣa*, also brings forth the four classes – and more. From his arms, he emits the god *Indra*, the human *Rājanya*, and the horse as animal. All three are martial entities par excellence in their respective grouping. In sum, the proto-Sāṃkhya passages classify the hands/arms as one of the five limbs of action and Vedic literature gives some insight into the type of “action” specific to hands/arms. Hands/arms seem to be associated with actions connected with power, authority, potency and order. I propose that an intensification of the normal number of hands and arms could symbolize an intensification of these actions and functions.

Proto-Sāṃkhya speculations on *Aṣṭadhā Prakṛti*, the eightfold, lower nature of god, is quite compatible with symbolic imagery in Vedic mythology and philosophy. The idea of a lower and a higher nature of *Kṛṣṇa* in the *Gītā* is not unlike the belief in a lower and a higher *Brahman* found in the *Upaniṣads* (itself the outcome of prior Vedic musings). The lower nature of *upaniṣadic Brahman* is a body, huge and full with creative potentiality. This Large Being of the *Upaniṣads* is in the *Gītā* *Kṛṣṇa*, the concretization of the eight, unevolved principles of life. The idea of an eightfold god also has Vedic precedence; the story about *Rudra*’s birth in the *Kauṣītaki Brāhmaṇa* tells of the arising of an eightfold god.³⁶ Moreover, it can be argued that already in this story, the eight forms of god are associated with eight forces in nature, most of which are life-bestowing. Even though there is harmony between these Vedic and proto-Sāṃkhya thoughts, is it methodologically legitimate to understand the *Gītā*’s eightfold god by way of proto-Sāṃkhya speculations? The *Gītā*’s orientation is after all theistic whereas classical Sāṃkhya is atheistic. The *Gītā* seems however to describe Sāṃkhya more as “a way of knowledge” and less as an elaborate philosophical doctrine.³⁷ So the answer is “yes, it is legitimate”. The *Gītā*’s theism places god’s eightfold nature below god’s higher nature, thereby not promoting two distinct and equal entities as does the Sāṃkhya system. Rather, the *Gītā* promotes a theistic, proto-Sāṃkhya view. God as *Aṣṭadhā Prakṛti* is god as embodiment of all the life-causing principles. In Sāṃkhya there are eight principles. Both the number and the symbolism associated with god’s “eightfold” lower nature relate to Sāṃkhya ideology.

Connections between Sāṃkhya beliefs and the nature of god in the *Gītā* can be found in other epic passages. In the *Nārāyaṇīya*, *Nārada* salutes the god *Nārāyaṇa* as being Sāṃkhya-yoga (12.325.68), indeed *Nārāyaṇa* upholds the Sāṃkhya system (cf. 12.290.109). A most explicit connection is pronounced by *Bhīṣma* when he pays reverence to *Kṛṣṇa*’s

³⁶ See Chapter 7, pp. 76–77.

³⁷ Hulin, *Sāṃkhya Literature*, p. 135.

Sāṃkhya nature as conceived by the Sāṃkhyas (12.47.34: *samkhyās tasmai sāmkyātmane namaḥ*). Such laudation, as well as other descriptions of the Supreme Being in relation to the Sāṃkhya system (e.g. 12.294.25ff.), give added support for interpreting god's divine material nature according to Sāṃkhya beliefs.

The Bhagavad Gītā gives the impression that the literary image of god's divine material nature (*daiwīm prakṛtim* in 9.13) could have been worshipped in iconic form. In 9.13, Kṛṣṇa, describing the way the wise venerate him, uses technical and contextually – laden terminology. He says, “But the exceedingly wise who seek refuge in my divine material nature . . . they worship (*bhajanti*) me . . . knowing that I am the imperishable (*avyaya*) source of beings”. The verb *bhajanti* comes from the same verb root as the noun *bhakti*. Bhakti worship is, of course, the type of veneration that is usually performed with an icon of the devotee's chosen god. The passage in the Gītā therefore allows for the existence of bhakti worship to Kṛṣṇa by devotees (*bhaktas*) who seek refuge in god's *daiwīm prakṛtim*. I interpret *daiwī- prakṛti-* as a reference to god's lower (and material) nature since we know from Arjuna's reaction to the epiphany of god's higher nature that it inspires fear and awe, not solace. All this is to say that Bh.G. 9.13 suggests the existence (latent or actual) of icons symbolizing god as the unevolved, imperishable materiality, as stipulated in the Gītā's proto-Sāṃkhya passage.

To date, I know of two early icons of Aṣṭadhā Prakṛti. Since this identification has not been previously proposed for an icon,³⁸ I ought to specify first what iconographic indicators warrant such an identification. Fundamental is the number “eight” associated with some bodily part. Within Vaiṣṇavism, there is a strong tendency to multiply the upper – body limbs of action.³⁹ “Eight arms” therefore signals a *vaiṣṇava* Aṣṭadhā Prakṛti, but not all eight-armed *vaiṣṇava* images seem to be representations of Aṣṭadhā Prakṛti.⁴⁰ There are two types of eight-armed *vaiṣṇava* images made in Mathurā in the Kuṣāṇa and post-Kuṣāṇa times. Both types can hold the same attributes (cf. Pls. 18.14 and 15) but they assume different postures. One assumes an hieractic stance, the other a posture connected with the Trivikrama legend.⁴¹ I consider the hieractic image with eight arms to be the *vaiṣṇava* representation of Aṣṭadhā Prakṛti.

The two *vaiṣṇava* Aṣṭadhā Prakṛti images depict god as a regal sovereign standing balanced and poised with four arms on either side. The one from Mathurā dates to the 4th century A.D. (Pl. 18.15) and the other one, from Bādāmi, Cave III, dates to the 6th century A.D.⁴² Since the full description of these two icons and their general meaning are addressed elsewhere,⁴³ it is necessary to highlight here only those visual features which I

³⁸ I did use this appellation in the publication cited in fn. 40 without providing much in the way of explanatory details.

³⁹ See Chapter 19, p. 281 for some thoughts on why early Vaiṣṇavism seems to multiply arms more than heads, whereas the reverse seems to be true in early Śaivism.

⁴⁰ See Doris Meth Srinivasan. “A Unique Mathurā Eight-Armed Viṣṇu of the 4th Century A.D.”, *Oriental Art*. Vol. XXXIV, No. 4, 1988/89, 276–281.

⁴¹ See details in Chapter 18, pp. 248–252.

⁴² See Srinivasan. “Eight-Armed Viṣṇu”, Fig. 6.

⁴³ See Chapter 18, pp. 248–252 and Srinivasan. “Eight-Armed Viṣṇu”, 276ff.

believe to be symbolic of the proto-Sāṃkhya beliefs. I understand “eight” to symbolize the eight materials needed for the production of life, and, “multiple arms” to symbolize the supra-normal ability and power to actually produce life. Broadly speaking, “eight arms” is a pictorial phoneme for an immanent divine Power having potentiality to cause the production of living things. Eight arms radiating around a figure standing equipoised, stiff and frontal lends further visual credence that energy is being contained within the trunk of the body, and that it is being spent via the arms. Although no specific Sāṃkhya or other textual reference indicates the symbolic significance of the hand-held attributes, it is not difficult to see that they relate mainly to physical strength, especially martial prowess. (The 4th century image holds a rock, a sword and arrows;⁴⁴ the 6th century image holds the wheel, arrows, the mace, the conch, a shield and the bow.) Attributes of physical strength and royal power (via the god’s crown) ascribe to god those qualities traditionally associated with the upper-body limbs of action. The sum of these iconographic modules announce the might, majesty and creativity of an immanent god. Each of the modules can regroup and form part of a different set announcing a different message. But here, the combination of eight arms, associated with a crowned god standing in *samapada*, holding *vaiṣṇava* attributes spells Aṣṭadhā Prakṛti.

The Gītā speaks of yet another *rūpa* of Kṛṣṇa in ways that contrast with his Viśvarūpa and Aṣṭadhā Prakṛti manifestations. This form is gentle and peaceful; the term is *saumya*. Viśvarūpa is a terrific *rūpa* see Bh.G. 11.49 *rūpam ghoram*; cf. 11.31), which terrifies Arjuna, but he is consoled upon seeing god’s gentle body (*saumyavapur* see Bh.G. 11.50; called *rūpam saumyam* in 11.51). The *saumya* form is a visible manifestation usually seen by the devotee. An epiphany of Viśvarūpa is extremely rare; Kṛṣṇa states that Arjuna alone has witnessed this marvel (cf. Bh.G. 11.45 and 47), for god has shown him the eternal unmanifest (cf. Bh.G. 8.20). When Arjuna can no longer bear this sight, he asks to see again the *rūpa* (Bh.G. 11.45) that he has seen before (Bh.G. 11.46). This *rūpa* cannot be the Aṣṭadhā Prakṛti, for it too (like Viśvarūpa), is by nature unmanifest (cf. Bh.G. 8.20). But Kṛṣṇa has a manifestation called *mānuṣī-tanū*-⁴⁵ in which the simple take refuge (cf. Bh.G. 9.11). This is the form Arjuna wants to see again, and, upon seeing it regains his composure. “Now seeing this your gentle (*saumyam*) *mānuṣam rūpam* Janārdana, I have returned to my rational thinking and have come to my usual disposition” (Bh.G. 11.51). Arjuna tells us exactly what this gentle form looks like:

I wish now to see you again as before with your regal crested turban, your mace and
discus in hand,
Assume the same four-armed form O Thousand-Armed One, of universal form.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ The fact that Kuṣāṇa eight-armed Trivikrama images also hold these attributes does not diminish the symbolism of the attributes when held by Aṣṭadhā Prakṛti. After all, the Trivikrama legend has conquest as its theme. But it should not be forgotten that the critical distinction between these two types of eight-armed images rests less on the hand-held attributes and more on the posture of the god.

⁴⁵ On the Vedic significance of *tanū*, see Chapter 3, fn. 20.

⁴⁶ Bh.G. 11.46.

With this verse we attain a picture of how the gentle, manifest, third form of Kṛṣṇa looks to the devotee. It is four-armed, holds specific attributes and is decked in regalia. This is Kṛṣṇa's *mānuṣa rūpa* or *mānuṣī tanū*.

Mānuṣa/mānuṣī is usually translated as "human"; does that mean Kṛṣṇa has a human body with four arms? The answer rests squarely on the meaning of *mānuṣa/mānuṣī*. In both instances, we are dealing with an adjective that is a secondary derivative of the masculine noun *manus*, "man or Manu (the father of men)". Secondary derivatives of this type add "a" as a suffix and often have, as in the case of *mānuṣa (ī)*, *vṛddhi* strengthening of the first syllable of the primitive word.⁴⁷ Such derivatives may be used substantively but they are primarily adjectives, "denoting *having a relation or connection* (of the most various kind) *with* that denoted by the more primitive word".⁴⁸ We are therefore dealing with terms specifying that god's form relates with, or connects with mankind. Instead of "human", I translate *mānuṣa (ī)* as "humane".⁴⁹ It now becomes clear that Arjuna, awed and terrified by the Viśvarūpa vision, asks instead to see Kṛṣṇa's humane form, which is so different from his higher Viśvarūpa and Aṣṭadhā Prakṛti forms. The third form of god is usually visible in the world of man. It is a gentle manifestation giving assurance of peace and protection. The four-armed form Arjuna, as bhakta, implores to see is apparently, the form he usually worships.⁵⁰

The form of god Arjuna venerates is the most frequently represented icon of Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa in the Mathurā school of the Kuṣāṇa period. [I specify this name of Kṛṣṇa to call attention to the Bhāgavata god whose center of worship probably was Mathurā, and, to distinguish this god from the later pastoral developments characteristic of Gopala Kṛṣṇa.] The Gītā, plus the rest of this epic, tell us enough about the meaning of the four-armed form to help explain its popularity.

The meaning of "four arms" needs to be broken down. Supra-normal number of arms probably signifies a capacity to engage in supra-normal action, as was already discussed above. The language of four qualifies the type and nature of the action. The epic demonstrates a usage of "four" that continues the symbolic connotations associated with this number in the Vedas, especially the Brāhmaṇas. "Four" continues to relate to the phenomenal world, in particular the four directions. Most importantly, the four directions are said to be the arms of Viṣṇu in the epic (cf. III.192.12; XII.47, after 59, the critical edition cites over eleven versions of the epic which insert a verse having "*diśo bhujā*"). As may be expected, "four-armed" is not a rare qualifier for Viṣṇu (see Book 5.64.15; 5.102.22). Thus the notions of "four" plus "arms" strongly suggest action that takes place in the phenomenal world, the world of man. The Brāhmaṇa tradition associates another mean-

⁴⁷ William Dwight Whitney, *Sanskrit Grammar*, Cambridge, 1955, Par. 1208a.

⁴⁸ Whitney, *Grammar*, Par. 1208.

⁴⁹ See Sir Monier Monier-Williams, *A Sanskrit - English Dictionary*, Oxford, Repr. 1960, p. 810, under *mānuṣa*.

⁵⁰ N.P. Joshi has also addressed himself to the problem of interpreting the Gītā's description of the four-armed form of Kṛṣṇa. He concludes that Kṛṣṇa in his normal form (*saumya rūpa*) is two-armed and the meditative or spiritual form is four-armed. See N.P. Joshi, "Kṛṣṇa in Art - Whether two-armed or multi-armed", *Bulletin of Museums and Archaeology in U.P.*, Number 21-24, June '78-Dec. '79, 20. I do not consider *saumya* to mean "normal", but I do agree that the four arms belong to the spiritual - I would rather say worshipful - form of Kṛṣṇa.

ing with “four” that relates to the human sphere and could further modify the nature of the action. This meaning associates coupling, human productivity etc. with the number four. Accordingly, four-arms could also imply supra-normal actions beneficial to the preservation of man. An overall, general meaning therefore for four-arms is supra-normal, auspicious actions performed in the world for the benefit, safety and increase of mankind.⁵¹

This meaning can be equally applied to the four-armed *avatāra* representations of Viṣṇu. The theory allowing for the broader application of this meaning is that it is a general definition of four-arms, having been arrived at by knitting together the symbolism of the separate parts of the expression. The fact that all the early *avatāra* representations have four arms and that the religious significance of the *avatāra* notion is congruent with the meaning of the “four-arms” established above, buttresses the validity of the theoretical approach. Incidentally, the characteristics of the four-armed *saumya* form of Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa are analogous to those of Rudra-Śiva’s *śiva* form. Both are on the distant side of the god’s awesome or terrific nature; both are the third manifestation god sends into the world for his devotees; both are the forms the devotee wants to see. Therefore should the *śiva* form also be four-armed, we may rest assured that the same general meaning given above could also apply to a Śiva image.

The combination of mace and discus, mentioned by Arjuna, and held in the extra hands of the Mathurā four-armed images, is a distinctively *vaiṣṇava* iconographic feature. This feature, as well as the regal headdress, are insignia stemming from the Bhāgavatas’ Vṛṣṇi Vira (or Hero) cult.⁵² Coming from the domain of martial power and hero status, these insignia do not necessarily contradict the benign message of the four arms. Their presence reminds that Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa is the apotheosis of the Great Hero, and they relate the potency and authority of the warrior to the upper limbs, recalling that Vedism too connects the arms with the Rājanya.⁵³

Over forty Mathurā images of this form⁵⁴ give mute evidence as to how dear it was to man. But if resounding evidence is sought, then we have only to listen to Arjuna’s wail when, bereft of Kṛṣṇa’s spiritual presence, he exclaims:

The Puruṣa, the Immeasurable Soul, of four arms holding the conch, the discus, and the mace, dressed in yellow, of dark complexion and eyes like lotus petals . . . is no longer seen by me . . . I cannot bear to live.⁵⁵

⁵¹ “Four arms” when combined with other multiple bodily parts may lose its peaceful or protective connotations. For example, the monstrous Śiśupāla is born three-eyed and four-armed (2.40.1), and the *ugra* form of Nārāyaṇa as Vyavahara (see 12.121.25) is four-armed and with four teeth, eight legs and many eyes (12.121.14).

⁵² On the Vīrāvāda, especially the Vṛṣṇi clan’s five hero cult, see H. Härtel. “Vāsudeva Worship”, D.M. Srinivasan. “Early Kṛṣṇa Icons”, and D.M. Srinivasan, “Caturvyūha and Variant Forms”. Full bibliographic references are in the fns. of Chapter 16.

⁵³ Further and more detailed analyses of the four-armed form of Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa are to be found in Chapter 1, pp. 21–22 and Chapter 18, pp. 247–248.

⁵⁴ D.M. Srinivasan, “Vaiṣṇava Art and Iconography at Mathurā”, in *Mathurā. The Cultural Heritage*, gen. ed. D.M. Srinivasan, New Delhi, 1989, p. 384.

⁵⁵ Cf. 16.9.19–20.

C

Towards an understanding of early Śaiva images with the multiplicity convention

Paradoxically, Śiva rarely appears in the Mahābhārata, yet references to explain the multiplicity in his iconography are not so rare. References other than those to Śiva can be enlisted. Let me introduce them. 1) By way of a dialogue between Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna in the Bhagavad Gītā, the epic provides insight into the meaning of the third eye, exclusively Śiva's in the art. 2) The significance of four-armed Śiva icons is not radically different from that of four-armed Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa icons. 3) Details in the epic on Śiva's eightfold manifestation indicate a probable meaning having much in common with Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa's eightfold manifestation. These examples of commonality could only occur if the convention transcends sectarianism. The convention, at its outset, responds more to general concerns about divinity's nature than to more narrow beliefs of any sect. 4) The epic also sustains, almost by default, some notions: belief in a threefold śaiva Reality seems to continue since the Mahābhārata neither adds nor detracts significantly from this theological belief; the epic carries forward key Vedic biological symbols affecting śaiva theology and subsequent iconography, especially those relating to the all-important liṅga – mukhaliṅga – mūrti series, propelled by a power akin to a germinating energy.

Remarkably, Coomaraswamy already grasped that germination occurs in the arising of Śiva. Intuitively, he connected the Mukhaliṅga image – occurring between Liṅga and Mūrti types of images – to the germinating process, or blossoming forth, though he likened the process to an artistic, not a biological “blossoming”.

“... images in the round may be ... non-manifest, like a *liṅgam*; or ... partially manifest as ... a *mukha-liṅgam*; or ... fully manifest in ‘anthromorphic’ or partly theriomorphic types. ... The stage of partial manifestation is compared to that of the ‘blooming’ of a painting. The term ‘bloom’ or ‘blossom’ (*unmīl*) is used to describe the ‘coming out’ of a painting as the colors are gradually applied. ...”⁵⁶

Now – to the details surrounding the epic's imagery of a germinating god:

“You are the one whose Liṅga is great (Mahāliṅga 13.17.74); ... who has a lovely Liṅga (Caruliṅga 13.17.74); ... who is perceptible in the Liṅga (Liṅgādhyakṣa 13.17.74). None other than Kṛṣṇa delivers this panegyric to the greatness of Śiva's Liṅga.⁵⁷ Kṛṣṇa is known to worship Lord Śiva in his phallic form – in every yuga! So says the Mahābhārata.⁵⁸ Kṛṣṇa adores the Liṅga which he knows is the origin of all material form (7.172.87). Lord Keśava always worships Śiva in the Liṅga as the origin of all creatures (7.172.90).

The creative puissance of Śiva's Liṅga is tantamount to the gist of a story in the Mahābhārata. Brahmā instructs Śiva to create all living beings, begins the tale in the Saptika Parvan. But as Śiva waits too long to go about the task, Brahmā solicits Prajāpati to be progenitor. When Śiva sees that creatures have been created by another, he tears

⁵⁶ A.K. Coomaraswamy, *The Transformation of Nature in Art*, New York, 1934, p. 168 and fn. 116 on p. 214.

⁵⁷ The laudations are included in the Sahasranāma stotra offered by Kṛṣṇa in the Anuśāsana Parvan of the epic.

⁵⁸ Cf. Droṇa Parvan 7.172.86.

off his *liṅga* and sticks it in the ground. He, himself retreats in anger to the Muñjavat Mountain.⁵⁹ The story unequivocally considers the *Liṅga* as emblematic of Śiva's creative power. This definition endorses Kṛṣṇa's aforesaid knowledge that the *Liṅga* is Śiva's ontological sign of cosmic creation. All material forms, we may be sure, arise from the *Liṅga*, including the visible body of Śiva himself.

When Kṛṣṇa addresses Śiva as the "Lord perceptible in the *Liṅga*" (*Liṅgādhyakṣa*) he is using an honorific applicable only to a god emanating from the *Liṅga*. *Liṅgādhyakṣa* is a name saluting the presence of Śiva both inside and outside of the *Liṅga*. The implication is that Śiva can be discerned in the process of emanating, or blossoming forth from the *Liṅga*. The process of germination, in other words, is perceivable.

Knowledge that germination of god begins with his *mukha*-s emanating from the *Liṅga* ought to have been known during epic times,⁶⁰ but the epic is opaque on the subject. The epic applies "*Liṅga*" names and, as will be seen below, "*Mukha*" names to Śiva; the epic knows that cosmogony occurs as a result of emanation.⁶¹ Yet, it does not directly connect these concepts to *śaiva* theology, not even in the suggestive manner of the *Mahānārāyaṇa Upaniṣad*. Only a series of deductions on indirect evidence can suggest awareness that god arises from the *Liṅga* in an emanative fashion. If the *Liṅga* is the origin of all creatures, as Kṛṣṇa acknowledges, and if Śiva is called *Viśvasambhava* (He from whom all things arise, XIII.14.163), and *Liṅgādhyakṣa*, and, if he makes a body for himself, bears that body, enjoys the body, is the embodied One, and is the refuge of embodied creatures (see 13.16.31), then the epic cannot be a stranger to the idea that the *Liṅga* projects the body of god along with the rest of creation.

Incidentally, when Śiva reveals himself in the epic as the origin of everything, the image is of *Viśvarūpa*, not "*Viśvaliṅga*". When Kṛṣṇa sees the epiphany of Śiva, he sees "One who has a thousand feet, a thousand heads a thousand arms, an All-Limbed One" (see XIII.17.128–129). He does not see a thousand *Liṅgas*, as it were. He beholds, there is no doubt, *Viśvarūpa* Śiva as the omniform *Puruṣa* of yesteryear.: "Your hands and feet are everywhere; your eyes, head, face (*mukha*) are everywhere. Your hearing extends everywhere. You stand encompassing everything".⁶²

A *Mukhaliṅga* is a type of image, as Coomaraswamy noted, showing a partial manifestation of god. What he did not say, perhaps because he did not care to analyze the term, is that the semantics of the term secures the type, even before the image comes into being. Take for example the way in which the epic uses the word "*mukha*" in two instances just cited. The term can mean "face" etc. in Mhbh. XIII.15.41 and also "the beginning" (XII.224.33–34, see fn. 61). What ties the two epic usages together is that

⁵⁹ For more details of this story in *Mahābhārata* 10.17, see Chapter 17, p. 232.

⁶⁰ See Chapter 17 on *Mukhaliṅgas* dating between the Śuṅga and pre-Kuṣāṇa times.

⁶¹ Hacker has shown that cosmogonic descriptions in the *Sānti Parvan* employ both a mechanistic and a theistic emanating force to explain creation. The theistic force is well represented in 224, vss. 33–34 of this *Parvan*, which begin as follows, "(the Creator), having awoken at the beginning (*mukhe*) of the cosmic day, creates the world through Nescience. . . ." See P. Hacker, "The Sāṅkhyization of the Emanation Doctrine shown in a critical analysis of Texts", *Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde Süd- und Ostasiens*, V, 1961, 90.

⁶² Mhbh. XIII.15.41. Cf. *Droṇa Parvan* 7.57.57 where the epiphany of Mahādeva reveals the same thousand headed, thousand armed, thousand eyed, thousand legged form.

mukha can designate something that begins a progression.⁶³ Thus *mukha* can be “the beginning” of day progressively unfolding, or, “the face” of a progressively unfolding body. The latter meaning is precisely the denotation of *mukha* in the compound “Mukhalinga”. “Mukhalinga” can be translated as “a Linga with head(s) or face(s)”, but what the term really signifies is “face(s)” or “head(s)” as the first element progressing out of the “linga”, when – and this is the crucial point – more than just face(s) or head(s) are forthcoming. Mukhalinga is therefore a concept in accord with a Lord “who is perceptible in the Linga”. This accordance and the usage of *mukha* in the epic is the second indirect indicator that the epic and its times ought to know of a *śaiva* unfolding which begins with the head of god.

The compound *mukhalinga*- is not found in the epic. It is not until the *śaiva* Āgamas that the compound is theologically used in a *śaiva* context. In the Āgamas, a Mukhalinga represents a stage in the unfolding of Śiva which lies between god’s invisible, transcendental Reality and his visible, phenomenal Reality.⁶⁴ This āgamic belief, namely that god moves progressively towards manifestation, is latent in the Vedas. It can be detected by means of the same critical term, *mukha*. Vedic descriptions of the construction of the altar employed in the Agnicayana ritual mention the use of sets of bricks called *mukha* bricks. Five *mukha* bricks deposited in five layers of the altar are placed in the four directions, plus the center. This pattern, repeated in all the layers assures that the altar faces in all directions (*sarvatomukha*).⁶⁵ Immediately after depositing these bricks, five bricks called *anga* or “limb” bricks are placed in close proximity to the *mukha* bricks. A “bull” brick follows, all but immediately, and, upon completion of the piling of the altar, homage is made to Rudra-Śiva.⁶⁶ The manner in which these bricks are piled shows that the first two sets of bricks, the *mukha* and *anga* bricks, symbolically build a body. As such, *mukha* denotes not merely “face” or “head” in this sequence, but “face as the initial element when more of the body is forthcoming”. The *mukha* bricks in the Agnicayana altar initiate the appearance of an anthropomorphic entity with limbs; also they usher in a theriomorphic entity, to judge from the “bull” brick that follows. The sequence in which the bricks are laid down is like a ritual rehearsal for the *śaiva* iconic types noticed above by Coomaraswamy. The sequence moreover demonstrates usage of the term *mukha* the same way the epic does, and in a manner highly suggestive of the properties of a Pañcamukha Linga image.⁶⁷ Here is corroboration then, for the probable correctness of the second indicator cited above, namely that the epic knows of Śiva’s germination, head first, out of his immaterial source, the Linga.

⁶³ This meaning can be best documented from Sanskrit mathematical literature dating from the 5th century A.D. onwards. A numerical series (*średhī*) begins with a quantity called *ādi*, or *mukha*, or *vaktra*, or *vadana*. See A.K. Bag, *Mathematics in Ancient and Medieval India*, Varanasi 1979, p. 180. The *Līlāvati* of Bhāskara uses the term *mukha* in its chapter on Progression (Rule 119), to signify “the initial quantity of the progression; that from which as an origin the sequence commences”. See H.T. Colebrooke, *Algebra with Arithmetic and Mensuration from the Sanskrit of Brahmagupta and Bhāscara*, London, 1817, p. 52. Bhāskara is of the 12th century, he based his work on that of Śrīdhara, a 10th century mathematician.

⁶⁴ See Chapter 19, plus details given in papers cited in footnote 66 of that Chapter.

⁶⁵ Baudhāyana Śrauta Sūtra 10.35.

⁶⁶ The symbolism in the building of the Agnicayana altar is explained in Chapter 14.

⁶⁷ On these properties, see Chapters 14, pp. 193–194 and Chapter 17, pp. 233–235.

Meaning of the “mukha” names praising Śiva in the epic can now be considered. Śiva is praised as Sarvatomukha (“having a face in all directions”; XIII.17.57), Caturmukha (“being four-faced, or four-headed; XIII.17.74);⁶⁸ Sumukha (perhaps “having an auspicious face or head”; XIII.17.125). The synonym of Sumukha, namely Suvaktra is used in XIII.17.43; interestingly, in later times, the formulas in the Mahānārāyaṇa Upaniṣad employing “mukha” names, are called *pañcasuvaktramantrāḥ*, that is, formulas of god’s five auspicious faces.⁶⁹ For this reason, but mainly because I believe the germination of Śiva is known in the epic, it is possible that these “mukha” names honor Śiva’s head(s) as they appear before his fully revealed body, as in the case of “Mukhalinga”.

A final indicator suggests that the Mukhalinga notion and its concomitant notion of progressive emanation is known in the epic. Among the names chanted to honor Śiva in the Anuśāsana Parvan are names which tally with the most common types of Mukhas seen on the early Mukhalingas. Can it be mere coincidence that the names “Yogīn” (XIII.17.39; cf. Pls. 14.4 on the right; 17.6 & 7), “Ghora” (XIII.17.50; cf. Pl. 17.3); “Uṣṇīṣin” (XIII.17.43; cf. Pls. 14.4 & 8), “Kapardin” (XIII.17.45; possibly Pl. 17.5) coordinate with the type of heads emerging from Liṅgas already in pre-Kuṣāṇa art? It does not seem mere coincidence. Rather, a theological correlation between these honorific names and their visual counterpoises seems to exist; the rationale for the correlation is that both the names and the images express characteristics worthy of ritual attention through prayer and iconic worship. Similar honorifics in praise of Rudra-Śiva are already used in the Agnicayana, of earlier composition than the Mahābhārata!⁷⁰

In sum, chances are that the epic knows about the notion of Mukhalinga. The strongest indication comes from passages which compare with descriptions of the Agnicayana, a rite whose orthopraxy and litanies help to shape the full-fledged “mukhalinga” notion. Already in the Agnicayana, the number of “mukhas” in each layer is five, and this number remains the theoretical constant for the heads in śaiva iconography.⁷¹ The Mahābhārata may be aware of a five-headed śaiva god, who accomplishes the aim of the germinating process. The evidence, laid out below, for the fully revealed, five-headed god is indirect but present nonetheless.

God fully revealed is called Maheśa in the Āgamas. He is the culmination of the unfolding process, being the initial embodied form of the transcendental. All other forms of creation, even other gods as well as other forms of Śiva, are emitted from Maheśa, also known as Maheśvara, Īśvara, Īśa, or Īśāna. Maheśa’s role as progenitor of the world develops early. The theistic Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad calls Maheśvara “the illusion-maker” because he creates the phenomenal world. In the later śaiva Atharvaśiras Upaniṣad, Maheśvara is a huge activator reminiscent of the gigantic Puruṣa. In the Śiva Purāṇa, the godhead himself describes the first deities he projects, born of his own Prakṛti: “Viṣṇu is born of my left side . . . Brahmā my right and Rudra is born of the heart”.⁷² This

⁶⁸ Note that Brahmā receives the same epithet; see under “caturmukha” in S. Sørensen, *An Index to the Names in the Mahābhārata*, London 1904, p. 174.

⁶⁹ J. Gonda, *Viṣṇuism and Śaivism*, p. 42 and p. 160, fn. 105.

⁷⁰ See Chapter 14, p. 194.

⁷¹ See Chapter 10, pp. 122–123, Chapter 17, pp. 283ff. Chapter 19, p. 275.

⁷² See *Śiva Purāṇa*, Vol. I, ed. by Prof. J.L. Shastri, Delhi, 1970 p. 210, vss. 16–17, p. 213, vss. 56–57.

sequence of gods arising from Maheśa is picked up again in several Āgamas;⁷³ another area of agreement in both the Āgamas and Purāṇas is that Maheśa is five-headed and ten-armed (e.g. see Liṅga Purāṇa Chapter 82, 1–5; Śiva Purāṇa I.9.2–3; Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa Khaṇḍa III, Adhyāya 44 and the Suprabhedha Āgama).⁷⁴ Thus when in the Anuśāsana Parvan of the Mahābhārata, Śiva is hymned as the one who emitted (*asṛjat*) Brahmā, Viṣṇu and Rudra, specifically letting Brahmā project from his right side and Viṣṇu from his left (see XIII.14.183) and when he is also addressed as the one with ten arms (XIII.17.40, *ergo* with five heads), there is reason to suppose that the concept embodied by Maheśa is present in the epic.⁷⁵

Another hint regarding Maheśa's presence is offered by the epic, although the hint pertains to the eight forms and not the five heads of the godhead. God is attributed a lower nature equated with the eight Prakṛtis, a characteristic that can be subsequently assigned to Maheśa. The Nīlamata Purāṇa, a 6th or 7th century Kashmiri Purāṇa, identifies Maheśa as Aṣṭamūrti (i.e. eight embodiments) and describes homage to god's eightfold bodies in the following manner: "... The sacrificer, the earth, ether, water, fire, the moon, the sun and the wind are stated to be your bodies which pervade the three worlds. ..."⁷⁶ The Liṅga Purāṇa (I.28.15–17) correlates the eight bodies with the self-same elements and adds that the eight forms of the Lord represent the empirical world. As Aṣṭamūrti, god is identical with Material Nature (termed Prakṛti or Pradhāna). Indeed, the Liṅga Purāṇa states that god first manifests himself in seven forms (*saptadhā*) by enveloping the body of Pradhāna (which thus counts for the eighth body).⁷⁷ Now, in the Mahābhārata, Śiva as Aṣṭamūrti seems to fulfill the same function as in the later texts. The epic states in XIII.16.54 that Śiva is the eight Prakṛtis and he is also higher than the eight Prakṛtis.⁷⁸ This pronouncement on Śiva's lower eightfold nature should fall upon ears ready to acknowledge a previous introduction to a lower eightfold form. Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa declares in the Gītā that he has a lower eightfold nature; actually five of the eight material elements itemized by Kṛṣṇa are the same as those assigned to Śiva's Aṣṭamūrti in the above-cited Purāṇas⁷⁹ (viz. earth, water, fire, wind, ether). Śiva's Aṣṭamūrti ought to signify in the *śaiva* context something quite similar to the Aṣṭadhā Prakṛti of Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa. The significance stems, of course, from the influential Sāṃkhya theory of evolu-

⁷³ Both the Ajita Āgama and the Kiraṇāgama contain the sequence, see D.M. Srinivasan, "Śaiva Temple Forms; Loci of God's Unfolding Body", in *Investigating Indian Art*, ed. by M. Yaldiz and W. Lobo, Berlin 1987, pp. 338–339.

⁷⁴ On the Suprabhedha Āgama, see T.A.G. Rao, *Elements of Hindu Iconography*, Vol. II, pt. II. Reprint New York, 1968, p. 379 and p. 191 in the textual appendage. Note that Chapters 74 and 304 of the Agni Purāṇa describe a five-faced *śaiva* deity which de Mallmann identifies with Sadāśiva. See Marie-Thérèse de Mallmann, *Les Enseignements Iconographiques de l'Agni-Purāṇa*, Paris 1963, p. 55. She states that Chapter 74 describes the deity with ten hands, while in Chapter 304 he has four hands.

⁷⁵ I cannot suppress the fact that Śiva is also assigned eighteen arms, thus presumably nine heads, in another section of the Anuśāsana Parvan (XIII.14.116).

⁷⁶ See V. Kumari, *Nīlamata Purāṇa* Vol. II, Srinagar-Jammu 1968, p. 286. vss. 1129–1130.

⁷⁷ *Liṅga Purāṇa* I, 19–24, cf. I.70.57–59.

⁷⁸ *aṣṭau prakṛtayaścaiva prakṛtibhyaśca yat param*; cf. III.46.26, which is according to J. Gonda (*Viṣṇuism and Śivaism*, p. 41), a variant of slight importance on the Aṣṭamūrti theme.

⁷⁹ See Chapter XI.B, pp. 141ff.

tion of the universe. The world evolves out of eight life-causing constituents. Prior to evolution, these constituents are unified as the eightfold body of the creator god. Śiva Aṣṭamūrti, just as Aṣṭadhā Prakṛti of Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa, represents the body of god equated with all (i.e. the eight) life-giving forces in nature. This and other proto-Sāṃkhya traits can be associated with Śiva in the epic, just as the epic cements a rapport between Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa and proto-Sāṃkhya beliefs. The Anuśāsana Parvan, in particular, connects Śiva with the early Sāṃkhya thought. Śiva is called "Puruṣa of the Sāṃkhya" system (XIII.14.154); "Kapila among the Sāṃkhyas" (XIII.14.159); "the refuge of the Sāṃkhya-Yoga" systems (XIII.16.25). No doubt the eight embodiments, whether applied to a *śaiva* or *vaiṣṇava* godhead, express "the fundamental truth that God and the world are one".⁸⁰ God's five faces (his Pañcamukha) proclaim, of course, a similar truth, though not primarily via Sāṃkhya symbolism but rather via Vedic numerical and directional symbolism, plus the later correspondences established for each of the five faces.⁸¹ One set of correspondences is the same five material elements as mentioned above.⁸² These five essential material elements thus correlate not only with the Pañcamukha names but also with the five of the eight names (*aṣṭanāma*) of Śiva as given in the Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa (52.5–9). Possibly, an identification (such as is reflected in the Nīlamata) between Maheśa, essentially a fivefold deity and Aṣṭamūrti essentially an eightfold deity is due to their both portraying Śiva's identity with the empirical world. The Mahābhārata does not deny the possibility of their similar nature.

Aṣṭamūrti, the eightfold manifestation, germinates in the same way as does the fivefold Maheśa form, so the images inform us. To say it simply, there are Pañcamukha Liṅgas and Aṣṭamukha Liṅgas; there are fully manifest five-bodied Maheśa images, and, there are fully manifest eight-bodied Aṣṭamūrti images as well.⁸³ As the sequence of an unfolding Pañcamukha type is analyzed in Chapter 19, I will only mention here that the Pañcamukha Liṅga (as in examples from Bhīṭā, Mathurā and Virinchipuram⁸⁴), can blossom into a fully manifested form that can have either one body and five heads, or, five separate bodies. A rare example of the latter comes from Himachal Pradesh and dates to the 14th century (Pl. 11.3). Although the image has been published twice it has not been recognized as a fivefold image of Maheśa, which it clearly is.⁸⁵ Indeed it is a fivefold Umā-Maheśvara image for the small female seated to the left of the main and eastern body of Maheśa is Umā. The depiction of this seated couple is well within the time-honored mode for portrayal of the Umā-Maheśvara theme (cf. Pls. 19.11 & 14). The way in which Maheśa's five faces are disposed in the five directions has much in

⁸⁰ Gonda, *Viṣṇuism and Śivaism*, p. 41.

⁸¹ See Gonda, *Viṣṇuism and Śivaism*, p. 44.

⁸² See Shah, *Viṣṇudharmottara-Purāṇa*, pp. 144–145.

⁸³ The name of the *śaiva* deity which is partially manifest out of the Liṅga is not Maheśa of course but Sadāśiva; this name already appears to be correctly applied in the Mahānārāyaṇa Upaniṣad (see Chapter 10, p. 120) and it is regularly used in this manner in the Āgamas (*ibid.*).

⁸⁴ See references in Chapter 19, p. 262 and fn. 18.

⁸⁵ See Madanjeet Singh, *Himalayan Art*, Greenwich 1968, p. 10 and p. 141. Singh calls the female Pārvatī and the statue "Pancanana Shiva"; T.S. Maxwell, "The Five Aspects of Śiva", *Art International* Vol. 25, 1982 pp. 45–46. Maxwell calls the female the "diminutive *śakti*".

common with the post-Kuṣāṇa Pañcamukha Liṅga made in Mathurā (No. 516).⁸⁶

Depiction of an eightfold germination is not common. Limiting myself to early examples, I can cite only two examples of Aṣṭamukha Liṅgas dating to the late and post-Gupta periods, and one example from Māṇḍhaḥ showing eight heads distributed over one body (discussed in Chapter 19). There is also only one early example of Śiva Aṣṭamūrti of the eight body variety. It is the 6th century Parel śaiva image (Pl. 11.4). Here is another image that needs no introduction since its iconography has been frequently, and again recently, described in painstaking detail.⁸⁷ I need therefore emphasize only those iconographic points which bespeak of the Aṣṭamūrti identification, and this is taken up next.

It will be remembered that the Liṅga Purāṇa notes that Aṣṭamūrti can have seven bodies, plus the one representing Nature, which I then count as the eighth body. By the addition of "one" (representing "the whole" of Nature) to the sum of its seven parts, a new number, "eight", is formed which expresses "completeness" in that category, namely Nature replete with its life-producing material constituents. The manner in which the Liṅga Purāṇa expresses the concept of Śiva Aṣṭamūrti is ancient and orthodox; it is grounded upon a formulation of mythic numbers already operating in the Brāhmaṇas.⁸⁸ The Parel image is deceptively simple to decipher if we apply mythological arithmetic to its iconography. The image shows seven male forms: the bottom one is a fully manifest figure and the remaining six are partially manifest. Mudrās, attribute (the waterpot), hairstyle, dress, even ornamentation do not radically differ in the seven forms. But six of the bodies have two arms; the topmost body has ten arms. Here is the crux. The topmost body is to be understood as having two plus eight arms because, ideationally, it constitutes two forms: one body in the group of seven, plus the eighth enveloping body. That is why the natural hands of the topmost body holds a waterpot in the left hand poises his right hand in a mudrā much like the other six males. But, the eight additional arms are separate and distinct due to their gestures and attributes. Going upwards by pairs, there are: two round discs, a bow and arrow, a sword and shield, a waterpot and a downward pointing gesture of the left hand. Thus, the top partially manifest body has two arms similar to the other six in the group, *plus* it has an additional set of eight arms since this set is meant to represent the eighth (or whole) body of Material Nature. I have used here the terminology used throughout this discussion, namely "partially" and "fully manifest" in order to connect the Parel image to the general śaiva theme of the germination of god, and, to indicate the direction in which this image ought to be read. The direction is downward if I am right in considering this a depiction of the progressive unfolding of Aṣṭamūrti.⁸⁹ I am uncertain, however, whether the name "Maheśa" should be applied to the whole Aṣṭamūrti image, or only to the bottom fully manifest body. In sum, my interpretation of the Parel image is in limited agreement with several previous

⁸⁶ See Gerd Kreisel, *Die Śiva-Bildwerke der Mathurā Kunst*. Stuttgart, 1986, Pls. 61 a-d.

⁸⁷ Maxwell, *Viśvarūpa*, Chapter IV.

⁸⁸ See the discussion of the "x + 1" theory in Chapters 6 and 12.

⁸⁹ Were it to be viewed as a construct for the bhakta's integration with god, the direction should be the reverse.

explanations, although my reasoning is quite different. I can agree with Heras that Maheśa is represented in this image, if we keep in mind Maheśa's connection with Aṣṭamūrti.⁹⁰ I agree with Maxwell that this is not an image of a particular descent although I do not agree with his suggestion that Śiva Kālarudra is depicted. Whereas I fail to understand Kramrisch's remark that the image "shows Śiva realized from within his state of power", I do agree with her that the image is somehow based on the meaning of the Liṅga. This is because the Liṅga's potential energy to cause germination is here being realized in actuality. Although the Parel Aṣṭamūrti is, to date, a unique śaiva representation, its iconography employs a language based on acknowledged symbolic forms, mythic numbers and literary images; the resultant message communicates the germination of the eightfold god.

Maheśa is not the form of god that mortals usually worship. "You are inconceivable (? different from) the object (? of worship) of all beings".⁹¹ That of course helps to explain why there are fewer Maheśa, Aṣṭamūrti and Viśvarūpa images than images of the līlās and aspects of Śiva as he appears in the phenomenal world. Mārkaṇḍeya, the epic's sage, addresses these distinctions; these are his words: "The mortals on earth worship God Rudra with good rites under the name of Śiva, him whom they call Lord Rudra the Pināka bowman. They worship Maheśvara with all manner of things".⁹² The sage signals a difference between god's cosmic forms [Rudra; Maheśvara] and his earthly form [Śiva], a distinction already alluded to in the Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad. With the words of Mārkaṇḍeya a threshold is permanently crossed. From now on, the general name of this god is based on the best aspect he can offer to the worshipper on earth. To appear as Śiva, the beneficent, is what the worshipper seeks from a god who unites the sublime and the terrible, although man is never exempted from the appearance of the opposite, namely the fearful aspect of god.

Mortals worship Śiva in rites that do him honour. Śiva is physically in attendance at a ritual if he is properly called to inhabit the image made for his occupancy. There are two ways to determine the types of Śiva images fashioned in the early periods. One is to review the ritual literature to determine if Śiva images are mentioned; the other is, of course, to determine the scope of the actual assemblage of pre-Kuṣāṇa and Kuṣāṇa Śiva images made in the Gangetic region.⁹³

Mūrtis of Śiva, from the currently available early assemblage, comprise both aspects: the beneficent (*śiva*, *saumya*) and the fearful (*ugra*, *ghora*, euphemistically referred to as *aghora*), although the latter is far less frequent. Anticipating their fuller treatment in Chapters 17 and 19, the aspects represented need only be registered here. Śiva in his mild form is concretized as Ūrdhvaretas (e.g. Pl. 17.10), as ithyphallic Śiva with his theriomorphic

⁹⁰ His and the other previous theories on the Parel image are in T.S. Maxwell, "Śaiva Images as Meditational Constructs", *Discourses on Śiva*, ed. M.W. Meister, Philadelphia, 1984, pp. 70-71. I do not agree with the interpretations of C. Sivaramamurti and A. Ziesenis summarized and convincingly criticized by Maxwell.

⁹¹ See Mahābhārata 13.17.149.

⁹² *The Mahābhārata*, Books II & III, Transl. and ed. by J.A.B. van Buitenen, Chicago 1975. Book 3, 221.24; p. 662.

⁹³ On the anomalous nature of Northwestern śaiva images see Chapter 19, pp. 267-271.

counterpart (the lion, e.g. Pl. 17.12), as Śiva Ardhanārī (e.g. Pls. 1.3; 19.12), and as Umāpati (e.g. Pl. 19.14), [plus Viṇādhara Dakṣināmūrti, if Sivaramamurti's identification is correct]. None of these fully manifest śiva images originally had [or have now] multiple limbs. Ardhanārī can have the third eye; but the application of this eye ought to have a potentially wider distribution among fully manifested figures since the eye adorns the brow of such partially manifest Mukhalinga faces as the Yogīn (e.g. Pl. 19.1), the Brahmacārin⁹⁴ and the Uṣṇīṣin.⁹⁵ Śiva in his terrific form of Virūpākṣa survives only by the head, without the addition of the third eye (see Pl. 19.15); two other *ugra* heads of Śiva from the late Kuṣāṇa period do show the extra eye together with the other features marking a fearful form.⁹⁶

The best clue for the meaning of the third eye comes from the mouth of Lord Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa in the Bhagavad Gītā. When prevailed upon by Arjuna to reveal his supernal form, he exclaims: "But you will not be able to look at me with just your normal eyes; I will give you a divine eye; see my majestic yoga" (Bh. Gītā 11.8). This response can be profitably applied to the significance of Śiva's third eye, although I do not believe the connection has been made before. Arjuna's normal eyes number, of course, two. When given "a divine eye" by the Lord, he will possess three. The extra eye is needed to perceive a sight impossible for ordinary eyes. Kṛṣṇa invites Arjuna to behold his universal shape filled with all the living creatures. The extra eye confers upon the possessor not only the capacity for seeing the supranormal but also "a memory" for understanding what is seen. Therefore when Arjuna is given the third eye, the imbalance between divine power and human power is momentarily redressed. Arjuna can now see and comprehend the extent of god's supernatural power and knowledge, his majestic yoga. That divine eye temporarily given to Arjuna in the Gītā is Śiva's signature in the art. Gracing the brow of Śiva, the third eye symbolizes this god's supernatural power and knowledge, his majestic yoga. This meaning of the third eye harmonizes rather well with some of the early Śiva images on which it is found. Śiva as Yogīn and Brahmacārin personifies the power of his asceticism and knowledge; Uṣṇīṣin heralds his divine majesty; Ardhanārī his self-sourced generative powers active at the evolution and dissolution of the universe. As these aspects, and indeed all aspects, whether *saumya* or *ugra*, originate from Maheśa, it follows that the powers symbolized by the third eye belong intrinsically to him. Though Maheśa is not usually worshipped on earth, in the instances when he is, he can have the third eye on one or more of his faces (e.g. Pls. 19.5; 19.9; 19.11).

For some reason not entirely clear, the current assemblage indicates that four-armed images of Śiva begin only in the post-Kuṣāṇa period in the Gangetic region. (There are earlier four-armed śaiva images produced in the sculptures and on coins originating from the Northwest; however since they cannot at present be given convincing theological identifications, they can only play a minimal role in any theological synthesis or iconographic interpretation).⁹⁷ Possibly connected with this trend of post-Kuṣāṇa multi-armed

⁹⁴ See Kreisel, *Śiva-Bildwerke*, Pl. 60f, p. 205.

⁹⁵ See Kreisel, *Śiva-Bildwerke*, Pl. 58b, cf. Pl. 84.

⁹⁶ See Kreisel, *Śiva-Bildwerke*, Pls. 93 and 96, and pp. 228–229.

⁹⁷ For a description of the Northwestern anomalies and the implications resulting from the absence of the critical theological typologies in these icons and coins, see Chapter 19, pp. 269–271.

Śiva images is the fact that four-armed *śaiva* icons are not mentioned until the description of cult practices in the Purāṇas; the Vedic ritual sūtras are not helpful in this regard.⁹⁸ The Liṅga Purāṇa contains a most informative section dealing with the benefits gained by installing Śiva's images (I. Section 76). Specific benefits result from the installation of specific images, which are then delineated. The greatest number are described without reference to the multiplicity convention, suggesting perhaps that the images are conceived on the "normal" anthropomorphic model. The two four-armed images mentioned are Śiva as the Ascetic (see vss. 27–28), and, Śiva Ardhanārī (see vss. 34–37). In Gupta art, they may be answered by the Ascetic image in the State Museum Lucknow and the representations of Ardhanārī in the Feroze Mistry Collection in Bombay and in the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (Pl. 11.5).⁹⁹ However, textual indicators cannot be altogether relied upon to illuminate artistic trends. There are, for example, four- and eight-armed Gupta Natarāja images,¹⁰⁰ but Section 76 in the Liṅga Purāṇa fails to mention any multiplicity with the Lord in his dancing posture.

The general significance of four arms on a Śiva icon is the same as for a *vaiṣṇava* icon, and this for several reasons. The fundamental symbolism of the components remains the same. That is, the basic notions adhering to "four" and "arms" remain stable, irrespective of the divine body they belong to. Not to be overlooked however, is the fact that "four arms" can indeed belong to quite similar divine bodies. In both the *śaiva* and *vaiṣṇava* cases, four-arms can occur with earthly, auspicious manifestations that humans worship (as distinguished from cosmic epiphanies less frequently worshipped by humans). In both cases, therefore, "four arms" symbolize a capacity for supra-normal, auspicious actions performed by god in the world for the benefit, safety and increase of man.¹⁰¹

⁹⁸ J. Gonda, *The Ritual Sūtras*, Vol. I, Fasc. 2 in *A History of Indian Literature*, Wiesbaden, 1977. Only two texts describe practices of interest. The Āpastambīya Grhya Sūtra describes in 7.20.1;13 a ceremony involving Īśāna and Kṣetrapati (p. 627). The Baudhāyana Grhya-Parīśiṣṭa contains a post-Vedic section mentioning the cult of Mahādeva. The bathing of the icon is explained in two sections (2.18.21), and the rite for installing the image of god is taken up in another section (2.16); see page 586.

⁹⁹ The first is illustrated in Kreisel, *Śiva-Bildwerke*, A 29; the second from the Los Angeles Museum (No. M.85.8) is in Kreisel, *Śiva-Bildwerke*, Fig. 116.

¹⁰⁰ E.g. The Sirpur Natarāja is eight armed and the one from Nachna is four-armed. See C. Sivaramamurti, *Natarāja in Art, Thought and Literature*, Delhi, 1974. Fig. 9 and Fig. 5. The Natarāja icon is a complex ideograph as has been pointed out long ago by Coomaraswamy and Zimmer and is sustained by Sivaramamurti's monograph. Considering myself absolved from entering into the intricacies of this vast subject, I will only mention here that four-arms and eight-arms most probably do contribute differently to the overall significance of any given Natarāja. The Gupta four-armed Natarāja would emphasize more the humaneness of Śiva and relate the meaning of the icon more to man than would an eight-armed image. As such, the former would represent the cosmic rhythms of cyclic generation and dissolution caused by the creator who offers to liberate his devotee from the bonds of the cycle. In contrast, an eight-armed Natarāja could emphasize more Śiva's identity and embodiment of world materiality and indicate how and why the creator causes both the generation and dissolution of the world.

¹⁰¹ This definition for "four arms" is applicable to early icons and indeed most later icons. Yet the later instances where it may not apply demonstrate the conceptual divide between *veda* and *līlā* discussed at the very beginning of this work (see Chapter 1). The above definition maintains that encoded into the meaning of "four-arms" is auspicious beneficial actions directed in some way towards mankind. However, Bhairava, a late historical development of a fearful aspect of Śiva, may also be depicted in art with four arms. It would seem unlikely that the same definition could apply to him. But maybe it (or parts of it), can. There are, for example, benevolent Bhairavas. See Stella Kramrisch, *Manifestations of Shiva*, Philadelphia, 1981, Fig. 30, p. 35. Already in the Liṅga Purāṇa (I. Section 76) it is intimated that there is indeed a benefit to be gained from

Let us apply this meaning to a *śaiva* form and see what happens. The example can well be a four-armed Adhanārīśvara, since it is one of the first four-armed *śaiva* forms to appear, and the conceptual suitability for connecting the androgyne to an ambivalent god like Rudra-Śiva has already been established.¹⁰² The androgyne of the Vedas, it has been shown, expresses the self-seminating power of the solitary creator of the universe. Now, in the section of the *Linga Purāṇa* which discusses the benefits from installing a four-armed Ardhanārī image (I.76.34–37), a meaning enlarging upon the Vedic can be recognized. The worshipper's benefits relate not to the creation, but rather to the dissolution of the world. The devotee of an Ardhanārī can anticipate entering the world of Śiva (the Śivaloka) and sharing in the plenitude of the self-fertilizing Lord. From the knowledge gained in the Śivaloka, he will attain liberation. It thus appears that by the time of the *Purāṇa*, a time roughly corresponding to the application of four-arms to an Ardhanārī icon, an expansion from the Vedic meaning of the hermaphrodite occurred. Ardhanārīśvara became a symbol of the evolving *and* involuting creative powers of Śiva. When four-arms is added to the developed symbolism of this form, then the resultant image may be seen as inviting the devotee to enter Śiva's heavenly world of pleasure until the dissolution, whereupon he achieves liberation. In the Los Angeles Ardhanārī image, the normal right hand (in abhaya mudrā) issues the invitation; the upper left, if indeed it originally held a mirror,¹⁰³ reminds not only of the illusory nature of the phenomenal world, but also its difference, on that account, to the Śivaloka. The extra right, which may have held the rosary, would then point to Śiva's superior yogic knowledge; such knowledge is gained through the power of asceticism which may be symbolized by the waterpot held in the lower left hand. Perhaps it is apparent that this interpretation rests, in no small measure, upon supplying answers to the six questions isolated in Chapter I as part of a methodology to determine the significance of an image with the multiplicity convention. The analysis of the Ardhanārī shows the usefulness of the epic and subsequent devotional literature; in this case, they have furnished information to help answer questions three through five: a *Purāṇa* clarifies the meaning of the specific form; the epic suggests a meaning for the multiplied limb, and, the epic endorses the traditional Vedic meaning of the number multiplying the limb. To this concert of meanings is added the symbolism of the hand-held attributes and gestures. (It goes without saying that the answers to the first two questions are a legacy that the Vedas bequeath upon *śaiva* and *vaiṣṇava* images, as the Summary in 11.A, already indicated). Lest it be forgotten, let me

installing different *ugra* forms of Śiva; the devotee surmounts all obstacles and is honoured in the world of Śiva. Not to be forgotten is the fact that an *ugra* (or *aghora*) mukha regularly occurs as the Southern face of Sadāśiva/Maheśa from the B.C. period onward. But these early occurrences are examples of *veda*, they illustrate a desire to know the nature of a god who is both fearful and beneficent. The later action of Bhairava, focussed on his decapitation of Brahmā, is *līlā*, a mad, wonderful tale about Śiva's release from sin. The shift must be noted when interpreting the multiple arms. However, the interpretation of a divine *līlā* need not necessarily begin from scratch. It is useful to determine whether prior theological orientations can appropriately be factored into an interpretation.

¹⁰² See details in Chapter 5, pp. 57–59.

¹⁰³ See fn. 99, (above) and p. 245 in Kreisel. This supposition is preferable to Pal's suggestion that the object may be a book; P. Pal. *Indian Sculpture. A Catalogue of the Los Angeles County Museum of Art Collection*, Berkeley, 1986; re: S 114.

make clear that a technique, based on these questions, is needed mainly because there is, on the one hand, an early, sophisticated, seemingly codified image of Ardhanārī using the multiplicity convention, and, there is, on the other hand, no iconographic treatise with details to provide a meaning. What is needed is a way to interpret the multiplicity of this image by means of a methodology sufficiently flexible to be able to undertake the interpretation of any early image exhibiting these multiplicity components. Towards this end, the interpretation of the Ardhanārī joins the other interpretations distributed throughout the first part of this book to illustrate the methodology described at the outset.

It should not go unnoticed that a Maheśa image can also have four arms. Since Maheśa represents the first embodiment of the transcendental, it is not altogether inappropriate that his body expresses a message pertaining to the phenomenal sphere. Usually it is a one-headed Maheśa image that can have four-arms (e.g. Pls. 19.17 & 19; see also Fig. 4 in citation of fn. 104 and Fig. 7 in citation given in fn. 73). It may seem that there exists a potentiality for confusion between such a Maheśa and a single headed, four-armed earthly form of Śiva, but in actuality this does not appear to be so. A Maheśa image occupies an architectural setting distinct from an earthly aspect of Śiva. A Maheśa *in situ* in a *śaiva* shrine occupies a position indicative of his place in the germinating process.¹⁰⁴ If a problem were to arise, it would be with Maheśa pieces no longer *in situ*. A quick overview of one-headed, four-armed Maheśa images mentioned in this study which are no longer *in situ* reveal that they have some distinctive properties not found on early *saumya* or *ugra* aspects of Śiva; prominent among these is that the form of the Liṅga is present or evoked in symbolic fashion. For example, the Yellesvaram and Mathurā figures of Maheśa are conjoint with the Liṅga from which Maheśa has fully emerged (Pls. 19.17 & 19). The absence of a Liṅga in the image of four-armed Śiva purportedly from Ahicchatra is enough, therefore, to prevent it from being considered a Maheśa, in the event that it is taken as an authentic late Kuṣāṇa sculpture.¹⁰⁵ The Liṅga may also be evoked in a type that could be called Maheśa-Ekapāda. It is described at length in the same Liṅga Purāṇa section (i.e. I.76.8–14): “the lord who has a single foot, four arms, three eyes and a trident. . . . who is stationed after creating Viṣṇu from his left side and four-faced Brahmā from his right side . . . Puruṣa . . . Prakṛti . . . the cosmic intellect . . . the cosmic ego . . . the Tanmātras [i.e. the subtle elements in Sāṃkhya] . . . earth . . . water . . . fire . . . the sun . . . the moon . . . the soul . . . and heaven”.¹⁰⁶ A passage in the Uttarakāṃikāgama makes it quite clear that the one leg of this divinity is associated with the Liṅga since it can appear in place of Maheśa-Ekapāda.¹⁰⁷ A few South Indian medieval carvings illustrate well the description in the Liṅga Purāṇa, showing not only Maheśa with four arms but also with Brahmā and Viṣṇu emerging out of his sides.¹⁰⁸ Interestingly, when Brahmā

¹⁰⁴ See D.M. Srinivasan, “From Transcendancy to Materiality: Para Śiva, Sadāśiva and Maheśa in Indian Art”, *Artibus Asiae*, Vol. L, 1/2 1990.

¹⁰⁵ It is illustrated in Kreisel, *Śiva-Bildwerke*, Fig. A 25.

¹⁰⁶ *The Liṅga Purāṇa*, tr. a Board of Scholars, New Delhi, 1973, p. 374.

¹⁰⁷ See the quotation in V. Natesa Aiyar, “Trimūrti Image in the Peshawar Museum”. *Archaeological Survey of India: Annual Report 1913–1914*, Calcutta, 1917, p. 279 and fn. 2.

¹⁰⁸ Two South Indian examples are illustrated in Rao, *Hindu Iconography*, Vol. I, Pl. F. Vol. II, Pl. CXIX.

and Viṣṇu do not appear, as in a relatively early relief (c. eighth century A.D.), from Māmallapuram, then the four-armed, one-legged god is given another distinguishing feature to show that he is Maheśa-Ekapāda; the god has three visible heads (to which we must add the fourth in the back and the fifth, invisible head, on top).¹⁰⁹ This type, which I call Maheśa-Ekapāda, is not to be confused with another and fiercer Ekapāda image. It also features four arms and the third eye, but not the multiple heads or the created forms of Viṣṇu/Brahmā etc.; therefore this type is not to be associated with Maheśa-Ekapāda.¹¹⁰ In any event, it should not be forgotten that a one-headed, four-armed Maheśa is a modification of the theoretical model, namely Maheśa, the five-headed, ten-armed god. But, a one-headed, four-armed earthly manifestation of Śiva is not a modification of something else. This distinction brings up one last observation relating to early *śaiwa* multiplicity imagery.

Śaiwa images display multiple heads, eyes and arms but only multiple heads signal the advent of the germinating god. Divine birth begins with the head just as does human birth. Totally revealed, Maheśa will have multiple arms, usually numbering double the number of his heads. In the case of a single-headed, four-armed Maheśa, multiple arms alone do not sufficiently remind that a divine birthing process has been completed; some other iconographic element(s) is present to indicate that the subject is Maheśa. The four-arms of a single-headed, earthly form of Śiva are not meant to carry the birthing allusion. Multiple arms of an earthly manifestations of Śiva call attention to the supranormal power of god's actions rather than to the mysterious way he descends to earth.

Strip away notions of divine germination, cosmic creation, epiphanies of the Power behind it all, and then what sort of multiplicity conventions remain? That is the lesson the Rāmāyaṇa can teach. When the Rāmāyaṇa mentions multiple heads, eyes and arms it does so in stock fashion. No probes are sent to pierce through theological mysteries by way of these stock phrases. *Veda* yields to *līlā*. And *līlā* tales contain short-hand epithets used over and over again because they encapsule something distinctive. Generally, Brahmā is the four-headed god, Śiva is the three-eyed One, Viṣṇu is the four-armed Lord. Indra is repeatedly "of a thousand eyes". Undeniably, these are clichés. But for us they are more than trite expressions. Each one makes noteworthy assumptions in both the credit and debit columns of the ledger.

Register on the plus side that the extra yogic eye is Śiva's most distinctive cliché employing the multiplicity convention, but quickly register skepticism on the opposite side. How can this be if throughout this study the theoretical model of the five-headed god has been the basis for the multiplicity discussions about Rudra-Śiva. That is precisely the point. Five headedness, eightfold forms, omniforms, all pertain to the domain of *veda*,

Fig. 1. Another is in P.Z. Pattabiramin. "Notes d'Iconographie Dravidienne: Ekapādātrimūrti" *Arts Asiatiques* 5, pt. 4, 1958, Fig. 1, p. 304.

¹⁰⁹ The relief is illustrated in Joanna G. Williams, "Śiva and the Cult of Jagannātha: Iconography and Ambiguity", in *Discourses*, ed. M.W. Meister, Pl. 265.

¹¹⁰ Williams ("Jagannātha") also recognizes that this second type of an Ekapāda image is different from the type described in The *Linga Purāṇa*.

where the aim is knowledge about the essential nature of god and the origins of the universe. But the god who can be called to intercede, to protect, to bestow, to enlighten mortals and destroy monsters, may do so through play and divine sport. It is in this domain that the third eye characterizes Śiva. Next, if we register on the opposite side of this entry, Indra's cliché of a thousand eyes, then we are led to conclude that the higher number of a bodily part does not necessarily connote a more exalted concept. A thousand eyes is not the conceptual superlative of three eyes.¹¹¹ In the Rāmāyaṇa's domain of *līlā*, "a thousand" remains the conceptual equivalent of "the ultimate number" but it is a concept devoid of cosmic significance unless coupled with other "thousands" of bodily parts. So, when Brahmā informs Rāma about his true immortal nature, he couples the imagery so as to conjure up the epitome of the cosmic male, Puruṣa: "... Thou pervadest all regions, the firmament, the mountains and the rivers, Thou, the Thousand-footed God, the Thousand-headed One, Thou of a Thousand Eyes!"¹¹²

Credit four-arms as being special to Viṣṇu because multiplication of arms is more characteristic of this god than of Śiva and "four" favors the terrestrial sphere, the focus of the Rāmāyaṇa. Early *vaiṣṇava* images bear out the preference. Not only are there more four-armed *vaiṣṇava* images than any other number, but also they are more prevalent than four-armed images of Śiva or the Goddess. It has just been observed that *śaiva* four-armed images do not occur until the Gupta period and then in measured fashion. Six, it will be seen, are the Goddess's distinctive number of arms in early art.

Credit Brahmā and his four heads with comprehensive knowledge on the manifest plane. Do we debit, or lessen on that account, the knowledge of Śiva and Viṣṇu? Certainly not. Their knowledge and powers include the manifest plane, but go beyond. That is one reason why Śiva's four heads in literature and art are not the hallmark of his distinctive holiness; his four heads simply remind that the fifth is invisible and that five-headedness is the hallmark of Śiva. In Caturvyūha icons, Viṣṇu has four heads in conjunction with the multiplication of some other bodily part, to wit, the arms. Intensification of the multiplicity convention signals a cosmic form of god and the Mahābhārata's description of the *caturvyūha* concept already confirms this.¹¹³ Cosmic structures and realities do not seem to be invoked by the stock expressions of multiplicity in the Rāmāyaṇa. No phrases allude to a Viśvarūpa, an Aṣṭamūrti, an Aṣṭadhā Prakṛti, Maheśa, Caturvyūha. The Rāmāyaṇa's actions and sensibilities are of this world and so are the conventional expressions of divine multiplicity it uses.

Warning: As the world view of *līlā* opens and the world view of *veda* recedes, the latter with its focussed purpose for the symbolism of the multiplicity convention may become an ideal; perhaps it will become a vibrant, perhaps an ossified ideal. I do not know. What I do know is that the thread will not be as taut again.

¹¹¹ Indeed, they may have first been thousand genitalia marking Indra which were changed into eyes; cf. R.P. Goldman. "Transsexualism, Gender, and Anxiety in Traditional India", *JAS* 113.3 (1993), fn. 99.

¹¹² *The Rāmāyaṇa of Vālmīki*, transl. by Hari Prasad Shastri, Vol. III, London, 1970, p. 340, being Book VI, Chapter 119.

¹¹³ For symbolic details on this form, see Chapter 18, pp. 252-257.

CHAPTER TWELVE

THE LANGUAGE OF NUMBERS

“Une *totalité*, et une *totalité* correspondant en principe à l'ensemble des parties de l'univers, voilà en effet ce qu'expriment essentiellement les divers nombres mythologiques.”

Abel Bergaigne, *La Religion Védique* II

Discounting anomalies, the trend in early Indian art is that organs and limbs of the divine are augmented only up to a certain number: three eyes, four arms, eight arms, four heads, five heads. The texts would permit an augmentation up to “a hundred” or “a thousand” when it is a question of a Viśvarūpa representation. But icons do not follow suit. The earliest series of Viśvarūpa icons are the sixth century A.D. Śāmalājī Viṣṇu Viśvarūpa icons. They show eight arms and three visible heads.¹ The Mahābhārata and the Purāṇas ascribe four, ten or eighteen arms to Maheśa who may have five or four faces. An eightfold form, the Aṣṭamūrti is also known in the Purāṇas. The icons of the pre-Gupta period show restraint. Icons of Maheśa do not usually have more than four arms and four visible heads (i.e. the fifth being invisible to the normal eye). Certain numbers appear to be more admissible than others for the multiplication of bodily parts in early Hindu iconography. In pre-Gupta times, these numbers are: three, four, five and eight.

In some instances it is possible to postulate technology as the determining criterion for the number of bodily parts an image may have. The difficulty in carving a Viśvarūpa with the ultimate number of arms etc. may well have caused the early images to be carved with the number of arms the sculptor was technically able to master (i.e. eight, or in one instance six). Perhaps for the same reason, early images of Maheśa do not show him with ten or eighteen arms. However, the substitutes (if such they be) for the higher numbers are regularly made from a limited choice of lower numbers and that appears to be based on another criterion.

There is every indication that the choice of the number multiplying a bodily part was mainly based on theological not stylistic or aesthetic considerations. To illustrate the point, a four-armed, single headed representation of Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa signifies a different theological idea than an eight armed, single headed representation of the same god. The former represents his visible, *saumya* manifestation on earth; the latter represents his parapsychical self as cosmic materiality prior to differentiations. These theological distinctions do not stem solely from the type of limb being multiplied since, obviously in the example cited, it is the same for both representations. The distinctions are mainly due to the connotative values adhering to the numbers “four” and “eight”.

¹ See discussion of these Viśvarūpa figures in Chapter 11.B.

This illustration will serve to introduce the thesis: a number can convey, as surely as a word, a specific concept; what is more, there exists in antiquity a well codified use of numbers by ritualists and speculative thinkers conversant with the conceptual properties of certain numbers. In other words, there exists a language of numbers, honed in religion and philosophy and it was transmitted from the sphere of religion to the sphere of religious iconography with its symbolic properties intact.

The reverse, it may be noted in passing also existed: words were used to express numbers just as numbers were used to express words. In the early centuries of the Christian era, a system of numerical words was developed and perfected. Works on astronomy, metrics and mathematics, written in verse, employed this system, as did inscriptions for rendering a date. Numbers were expressed by words whose *śāstric* meaning connoted the number.² Thus a word denoting something unique (e.g. *go*, *ādi*, *candra* etc.), can represent the number "one". A word denoting a pair (e.g. *netra*, *karna*, *aśvin* etc.), can represent "two". *Trinetra* ("three eyes"), *guṇa*, *triguṇa*, *agni* etc. can represent "three".³ Numerical words went well beyond "nine" and could also express fractions and zero.⁴ Perhaps the reason that Sanskrit developed this capacity is to be found in the myriad possibilities for punning and multivalent expressions that are permissible in a highly inflected language. In any case, the inclination to find symbolic connections between words and numbers fostered a language of numbers using word numerals and numerical words in ancient India. A basic hypothesis of this entire study is that the significance of multiple bodily parts depends importantly on decoding the symbolism of word numbers.

The language of numbers multiplying limbs and organs in early Hindu art may, in some instances, begin prior to Vedic conventionalizations. Take the number "five", the basal unit by which *śaiṣa mukhas* are represented. The association of "five" with the concepts "all, totality" begins with meanings associated with the Indo-European numeral "five". **Penk^w* the Indo-European number "five" originally designated the completion of the counting of all the fingers of one hand.⁵ The hand with its five fingers was undoubtedly the basis for the quinary Indo-European numeral system, and "five" originally expressed the concept "all" (i.e. all five fingers of one whole hand).⁶ The fact that *penk^w*, the morpheme to be presumed for IE *penk^w* compares with Hittite *panku-* meaning "all, whole", serves to underscore that this was probably the original meaning for the IE word for the number "five".⁷

The notion "whole" etc. continues to be strongly associated with the number "five" in Hinduistic ritual and philosophic texts. The five seasons comprising the year (ŚB 11,7,4,4) signify temporal completeness. The five vital breaths (*prāṇa*, *apāna*, *samāna*, *udāna*, *vyāna*) represent all the breaths;⁸ the five regions represent all the world (ŚB 9,2,3,26). Similarly,

² B. Datta and A.N. Singh, *History of Hindu Mathematics, A Source Book*, Lahore, 1935; pp. 53-57.

³ For the close association between "three" and the god Agni, see Chapter 2, p. 30.

⁴ Datta and Singh, *Hindu Mathematics*, pp. 54-57.

⁵ E. Polomé, "The Indo-European Numeral for 'Five' and Hittite *panku* - All", *Pratidānam*, ed. J.C. Heesterman, The Hague, Paris, 1968; pp. 98-101.

⁶ Polomé, "Five", p. 100.

⁷ Polomé, "Five", pp. 100-101.

⁸ M. Eliade, *Yoga Immortality and Freedom*, Second ed. Princeton, 1969, pp. 384-385.

five tribes represent all of humanity,⁹ five rivers all the waters on earth.¹⁰ Later, the Sāṃkhya system postulates the five subtle elements (*tanmātras*), five sense organs (*buddhīndriyas*), five organs of action (*karmendriyas*), and five gross elements (*mahābhūtas*).¹¹

With the same emphasis on completeness, a person may be said to be fivefold, the sacrifice fivefold and the sacrificial animal fivefold.¹² These expressions, plus so many others that signify “the completeness of things”¹³ via their fivefoldedness, culminate in the Brāhmaṇic outlook that “this whole world, whatever there is, is fivefold” (see BAU 1, 4, 17).

In that the five seasons may be coordinated with the five regions of the universe, the possibility for “five” to connote “spacial” as well as “temporal” completeness can be expected. The terrestrial universe was divided into four parts or directions, plus the fifth point, or the center. This division underlies the association of the fifth with the navel in the Kauśika sūtra (64, 3f.). The four directions plus the center represent the world in its spacial entirety. Thus when the king, as sacrificer in the Rājasūya, takes five steps he is, in effect, proclaiming his universal sovereignty. The center can also be conceived as an extension above the four quarters. In the same Rājasūya, the four directions are associated (among other things), with meters in the *digvyāsthāpanam* section, and, the *pañkti* meter (composed of five pādas) is associated with the zenith.¹⁴ With an aim towards symbolizing cosmic completeness, five brahmans are placed towards the various regions in the Pāraskara Gṛhya Sūtra (1, 16, 10ff.), “the fifth towards the zenith”.¹⁵

The notion that the “fifth” marks the center above the terrestrial sphere is concretized in the construction of stūpas. Some Gandharan votive stūpas show the placement of four pillars in the four directions, and the fifth pillar in the center position, rising upward from the *harmika*. In one model (Pl. 12.1), the central pillar is pierced by five discs, providing an additional connection between “five” and the central apex. The five discs rising vertically along the central axis, or the fifth point, recall the Brāhmaṇic belief in the ascending progression of the five regions of the world (ŚB 9,2,3,26).¹⁶ The central point on earth becomes the point wherefrom ascension towards the higher celestial regions can take place. “Five” is thus a number representing “the center” as the point of communication between the terrestrial and the celestial. In the stūpas of Andhra Pradesh dating to the second and third centuries A.D., this notion of “five” is structurally incorporated. The central apex above the stūpa dome is marked by one pillar placed in that central position. Below, on each of the four projections originating from the stūpa drum are placed five pillars (the *ayaka* posts). Each of the four projections face in one of the cardinal

⁹ See E.W. Hopkins, “Numerical Formulae in the Veda and Their Bearing on Vedic Criticism” *JAOS* 16, 1894–1896; 278; J. Gonda, *Viṣṇuism and Śivaism*, p. 45.

¹⁰ Cf. A.B. Keith, “Numbers” in *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics*, IX, 1917, 407.

¹¹ Gerald J. Larson, *Classical Sāṃkhya*, Second rev. ed. Delhi, 1979, pp. 7–8.

¹² See J. Gonda, *The Savayajñas*, in *Verhandelingen der Koninklijke Nederlandse Akademie van Wetenschappen*, Afd. Letterkunde, N.R. Deel LXXI, No. 2, Amsterdam, 1965, pp. 240–241.

¹³ For others, consult J. Gonda, *Viṣṇuism and Śivaism*, pp. 44–48.

¹⁴ J. Gonda, *The Savayajñas*, p. 130; he also cites ŚB 8.3.1.12 where the zenith is the *pañkti*.

¹⁵ J. Gonda, *Vedic Ritual, The Non-Solemn Rites*, Leiden-Köln, 1980, p. 37.

¹⁶ See Chapter 6, p. 72.

directions.¹⁷ Actually, all stūpas share an orientation towards the cardinal directions, the demarcation of a central point within this orientation, and a vertical axis rising from the central or fifth point.¹⁸ Stūpas, it seems, are structural representations of “five” as the connective link between the mundane and supramundane regions of the world.

These selected examples of the symbolic usages of “five” ought to suffice for what an exhaustive listing would corroborate, namely that the number “five” expresses totality of physical things, ritual powers, metaphysical properties, spacial and temporal completeness on earth as well as the connective point between cosmic planes.

The connotative properties of “five” are fully employed in the various aspects of the Agnicayana ritual (see Chapter 6). One aim of the rite is to reconstruct Prajāpati so as to restore the creator and his ability to begin a new cycle of creative activity. Prajāpati is fivefold; in the initial exertion of cosmic labour, his five bodily parts relax and fall apart. The god needs to be made whole again. To this effect a system of correlations and identifications is established between the god’s five bodily parts (*tanū-s*) and the five layers of the main sacrificial altar. In this system, the power of “five” to signify completeness of physical and metaphysical entities is exploited. Prajāpati is identified with the year, his five bodily parts coordinate with the seasons (ŚB 6,1,2,18), thus the construction of the five-layered altar symbolizes on one level the renewal of time to its annual beginning before diminution sets in. The value of “five” as temporal completeness is thus emphatic. The size of the altars, as well as the ritual enclosure is relative to the size of the sacrificer. The sacrificer is measured standing with his hands raised above his head. The distance from the finger tips to the ground is copied on a measuring stick and this distance becomes the calibration upon which the major ritual measurements are made.¹⁹ The use of “five” and “a fifth” dominate in the ritual measurements. The stick is divided into five equal parts; the fifth becomes the basic measurement determining the sizes of the altars, enclosures and some of the bricks. In that the yajamāna’s size is factored into the dimensions of the enclosure, the altars and bricks, they are his and he may be identified with them. Of particular importance in this regard is that the size of the bricks constructing the main altar is determined by measurements derived from the yajamāna (i.e. the sacrificer). As such, the yajamāna may be identified with the main altar representing the body of Prajāpati. This correlation furthers another aim of the rite, namely the transformation of the yajamāna’s earthly body into a heavenly body. The yajamāna performs the Agnicayana in order to ascend to the heavenly regions (ŚB 9.2.3.24) and mingle with the gods. His ascent is achieved by the magical correspondence established between the five layers of the altar and the fivefold nature of the cosmic planes. Accordingly, upon completion of the building of the altar, the sacrificer in his heavenly body has attained the highest celestial realm. The meaning of “five” as the point linking the various cosmic planes predominates in this context. No doubt, the success of the rite on

¹⁷ There are thus twenty-one posts. On the symbolism of this number see B.S. Miller, ed. *Exploring India's Sacred Art, Selected Writings of Stella Kramrisch*, Philadelphia, 1983, p. 338, fn. 13.

¹⁸ Adrian Snodgrass, *The Symbolism of the Stupa*, Cornell University, Ithaca, 1985, pp. 12–13.

¹⁹ The discussion on measurements in the Agnicayana closely follows the descriptions given by F. Staal, *Agni*, Berkeley, 1983, Vol. I, pp. 195–199.

the various cosmic planes is secured because “five” dominates in the number of bricks, the number of sets of bricks, and the number of layers of bricks used in the main altar of the Agnicayana.

The language of “five” is extended when “five” is considered as the number resulting from the “x plus one” formula. If “x” represents the quadrants and “1” is the center, or fifth point, then the resultant number “five” gains several significant and cosmological nuances. A philosophic tension occurs between the quadrants and the fifth point. The quadrants are real spacial orientations, whereas the center exists only by virtue of the specified quadrants. Were the directions not specified, there would be no center. In that the center, or fifth point, does not physically exist as a point in its own right, it could become associated with some superior or invisible designation. Thus “five” as the product of “four plus one”, or the quadrants and the center, may have become the appropriate number to designate a para-physical region, point, or entity. All these designations are woven into the symbolism of the Agnicayana.

From the perspective of this study, it is highly suggestive that the multivalency of “five” occurs in the Agnicayana. The ritual, as noted above, has definite *raudraic* features. The “pañca mukha” bricks are set down in the altar according to the pattern seen in the disposition of the pañcamukhas of a Liṅga. The need for “five” *mukha* bricks and not some other number is because each mukha brick is meant to face (to constitute, perhaps) a direction of the cosmos. For the same reason, it is necessary that the *anga* bricks total “five”. The resultant “five-headed”, “five-limbed” entity extends into and beyond all phenomenal dimensions. That entity should already have some connection with Rudra since the main altar, upon completion, is identified not only with Prajāpati but also with Agni in his Rudra form. The five mukhas of the *śaiva* Pañcamukha Liṅga should, analogously, announce a cosmic Entity who arises from the most subtle essence, the Liṅga. When the full anthropomorphic form has unfolded, there stands the god who links the higher and the lower cosmic planes. The Āgamas call this link Maheśa. Having a head in each of the five directions (the quadrants plus the top located in the center), Maheśa’s universality is proclaimed. Specifically, the power to create and connect the planes, to see, to know, to rule over all, that is the significance of having “five” – and not some other number – of mukhas. In addition, the fifth head in the center takes on the conceptual properties of the fifth point; it is the most subtle and rarified of the Pañcamukhas. In that “one”, specifically one head (Ekamukha) may act as the synecdoche for “five heads”, the same meanings, purportedly, adhere to an Ekamukha of a Liṅga.

The discussion on “five” has parenthetically introduced us to the dominant notion residing in “four”. “Four” is preeminently associated with the quadrants. “Four pointed is the earth”, a Rig Vedic hymn declares (10.58.3), and this outlook continues in the Vedic tradition. The four quarters mark off sacred or profane space, and the latter is capable of being transformed into auspicious ground by means of rites and ceremonies. For example, one who builds a house offers oblation to the four principal directions with four mantras in the Mānava Gṛhya Sūtra (2.11.8).²⁰ In the Rājasūya, the king, seated in

²⁰ J. Gonda, *Vedic Ritual*, p. 36. The nadir and zenith receive praise with two additional mantras. Thus, the number “six” has directional implications.

the center, is given homage by four priests seated towards the quadrants; thereby is emphasized the close interrelationship between sacral and temporal powers on earth. Sāṃkhya teaching indicates that "four" can also symbolize that which is apprehended by the senses in phenomenality. It is accepted in the school that the first four elements of the five gross elements (i.e. the *mahābhūtāni*) can be detected by the senses, while the fifth, ether, cannot.

The association of "four" with the terrestrial sphere is a widespread human phenomenon on which Annemarie Schimmel has this to say: "Die Vier ist unlösbar mit der ersten erkenntnismässigen Ordnung auf Erden verbunden. . . ." ²¹ "Four" is the organizing number; it brings order into life lived on the horizontal plane of earth. Schimmel cites many examples ranging from the uses of "four" in the practical life of ancient and not so ancient Europe (as the division of students and professors at the University of Paris, during the Middle Age, into four "nations" that of the French, English, German and Norman), to the uses all over the world of "four" in urban planning by way of the quadrangular layout. ²² To these examples of the organizing property of "four" in man's daily life, she correctly adds Hinduism's "four" varṇas, "four" aims of life, and Buddhism's "four" noble truths. ²³

"Four", it must quickly be noted, can also refer to the tetradic organization of vertical space in ancient Indian thought. Here "four" is associated with the four regions which together constitute the regions vertically aligned in space. These regions are the earth, the atmosphere, the sky and the upper sky or heaven. The upper sky is not visible to the world below, and, in effect is sharply distinguished from the three lower phenomenal planes. ²⁴ This fourfold concept of verticle space differs from the fivefold concepts previously mentioned in that the *nāka*, or firmament placed "on the back" of the visible sky, is omitted in the fourfold sequence.

In addition to the four regions of verticle space, there are other uses of "four" as the organizing number of the cosmos. The Indians conceived of four oceans, a fourfold sacred Vedic tradition necessitating a fourfold officiating priesthood, and the not-to-be-forgotten divine wish-fulfilling cow, Kāmadhenu, equipped with four udders. ²⁵

The aggregate of these uses and symbols results in ascribing to "four" the more generalized meaning of "spacial totality". The best textual examples for this meaning of "four" occur in Vedic descriptions of Agni, some of which are noted in Chapter 2. With his four faces, Agni extends in the four cardinal directions, with his four limbs he extends into all visible space on earth, with his four eyes he sees everything in phenomenality.

"Four" is also charged with meanings connoting "fertility and productive union". A very clear statement of this usage of "four" occurs in ŚB 1.9.2.6: "he worships four deities, four means a couple, for a couple means two-and-two and a two-and-two they are; thus a productive union is effected". ²⁶ To understand the basis for this meaning of

²¹ Franz Carl Endres, Annemarie Schimmel, *Das Mysterium der Zahl*, Köln 1984, p. 102.

²² Endres, Schimmel, *Zahl*, p. 116.

²³ Endres, Schimmel, *Zahl*, pp. 110-115.

²⁴ See Chapter 6, p. 70.

²⁵ See J. Gonda, *Samayajñas*, pp. 54-55; 60; 349.

²⁶ J. Gonda, *Vedic Ritual*, p. 36.

“four” requires a quick look at the morphology of Sankrit numbers. The first four numbers in Sanskrit, as in all Indo-European numbers, are declined; that is, “four” has gender. Since there is a masculine “four” and a feminine “four”, it is not difficult to see how “four” could signify “a couple”.²⁷ The act of coupling or of forming “a productive union” can also be conveyed by “four” if that number is understood to be the result of coupling, or, we may say “doubling”. It should not go unnoticed that when “four” connotes “a couple”, “coupling”, “fertility” etc., it again becomes a number related to the earth, this time to actions on earth. The actions are auspicious, beneficial and congenial to the preservation of human life on earth.

It may now be observed that “four” covers a very wide spectrum of meanings, from the rather prosaic “all phenomenal space” to meanings that are quite subtle and grandiose. “Four”, in sum, bespeaks of visible and invisible space, apprehensible matter, divine majesty and actions that have beneficial effects in maintaining human life on earth.

The language of “four” thus exhibits a circumscribed latitude which can deal effectively with the divergent deities who have four arms. It is well to remember that these deities share some commonalities which are factored into the language of “four”. In early Hindu art, a four-armed image mainly represents an earthly form of the god. It may be that the form receives human worship, or, it may be that the form acts in behalf of human affairs, making the god a humane god. In either case, a four-armed image heralds the descent of the divine to earth where he becomes a manifest entity. Note for example, that all the *avatāra*, or descent, icons of Viṣṇu have four arms [to wit, Hayagrīva, Varāha and Narasiṃha]. Note too, that the images of Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa are mainly four-armed and that the Bhagavad Gītā knows this form to be the peaceful, humane form of god. In perfect agreement with the semantics of “four”, the Gītā recognizes that a four-armed form of god is easy to approach in veneration. With respect to *śaiva* icons, it should be observed that the icons installed for worship are, according to the *Linga Purāṇa*, either not described with additional arms or they are noted as having four arms;²⁸ there is one reference to the seven hands of an image of Īśāna, lord of sacrifices (I.76.15). The number is undoubtedly chosen because it is the Vedic number *par excellence* associated with the ritual.²⁹

If the language of “four” relates first and foremost to the terrestrial sphere, then that of “eight” begins where “four” leaves off. “Eight” surpasses the terrestrial. The numerical value of “eight” as the double of “four” conditions its symbolic development. To begin “eight” designates the eight directions which are counted as the four cardinal directions plus the four intermediate points of the compass (*Mānava Gṛhya Sūtra* 2.5.3 etc.). The conceptualizations of eight auspicious things, the *aṣṭamaṅgala*, may also be based on the doubling of four auspicious things, as the earliest representations of the *aṣṭamaṅgala* seem to indicate. A Jaina Āyāgapāṭa from Mathurā, pre-dating Kaniṣka, features the earliest representation of the *Aṣṭamaṅgala*. The eight symbols are depicted on an upper and a

²⁷ A myth relating to this grammatical feature is found in Chapter 6, p. 69.

²⁸ In one instance (I.76.22–26) there is a choice; the omniscient Lord can have either a thousand or four arms.

²⁹ Cf. discussions in Chapter 2, p. 31 and Chapter 6, pp. 73–74.

lower register of the paṭa. On the upper register occurs one set of four symbols (two fish, the mirror, the *śrīvatsa* and the food vessel or *vardhamānaka*); on the lower register occurs the second set of four symbols which are the *ratnatraya*, the full lotus, possibly the *bhadrāsana*, and the *pūrṇa ghaṭa* or full vase.³⁰ The Aṣṭamaṅgala are here rendered as the sum of two sets of four auspicious symbols. Another Āyāgapāṭa from Mathurā corroborates the assumption that an ideograph of eight auspicious things results from the doubling of four auspicious things. The Āyāgapāṭa features only four auspicious things (the *svastika*, the *śrīvatsa*, the two fish and the *bhadrāsana*).³¹ Each *maṅgala* is placed in one of the cardinal directions, giving additional support that “eight” and “eight directions” are allied to conditions arising from the doubling of four.

The number “eight” in the series of maṅgalas, or auspicious signs, is not the only occurrence of “eight” in an auspicious context. Actually, “eight” and numbers ending in “eight” are believed to bring good luck.³² From the many examples cited by Gonda for the practice of using lucky “eights” in domestic rites, one typical example is given: the Āgṇiveśya Gṛhya Sūtra (1.6.2:36,16) states that eight *homas* in marriage assure complete prosperity (*samṛddhi*).³³ Perhaps a similar reasoning causes the Gāyatrī mantra to be repeated eight, or a number ending in eight, times in the Saṃdhyā ritual.³⁴ Not only in ancient India is eight a lucky number. The Eight Jewels in Confucianism and the Eight Immortals in Taoism are two other Asian expressions among the many other “lucky eights” used throughout the world.³⁵

The notion of completeness is associated with “eight” when this number designates the seasons. The AV Paippalāda (16,100,5–12) recognizes eight seasons and gives to each a name. The eighth season is called “sarva” meaning “all, whole”. This name makes it probable that the eighth and last season was thought to complete the preceding seven. Certainly seven seasons are more frequently mentioned in the Vedas.³⁶ The AV Paippalāda would seem to be using “eight” as a number which sums up and completes the elements enumerated by the preceding numbers. Thus, if seven seasons constitute the entire number of seasons, then the extra one, or the eighth, is the “whole” which encompasses the rest and exceeds the rest. The notion of “eight seasons” especially as registered in the AV Paippalāda is based on the “x plus one” formula. Even in cultures where this formula is not known, eight can be used quite similarly, for as Schimmel notes, “eight is” die Rundzahl, that is, the number that rounds off another number.³⁷ Each time we use the expression an eight-day “week” we are in fact using “eight” in this fashion.

³⁰ On this Āyāgapāṭa, now in the National Museum, Delhi, and other related subjects, see A. Wayman, “The Mathurā Set of Aṣṭamaṅgala (Eight Auspicious Symbols) in Early and Later Times”, in *Mathurā: The Cultural Heritage*, ed. D.M. Srinivasan, New Delhi, 1989, pp. 236ff.

³¹ See Vincent A. Smith, *The Jain Stūpa and Other Antiquities of Mathurā*, reprint. Delhi, 1969; p. 16, Plate IX.

³² J. Gonda, *Vedic Ritual*, pp. 38–39.

³³ J. Gonda, *Vedic Ritual*, p. 39.

³⁴ D.M. Srinivasan, “Saṃdhyā; Myth and Ritual” *Indo-Iranian Journal*, Vol. XV, 1973, 162; 166; fn. 20.

³⁵ See Endres, Schimmel, *Zahl*, pp. 172ff.

³⁶ See Keith “Numbers”, p. 407; J. Gonda, *The Śaṅkayajñas*, p. 259. For many other examples involving “seven” see Hopkins, “Numerical Formulae”, 277ff.

³⁷ Endres, Schimmel, *Zahl*, p. 179.

Some of the concepts noted above (completeness, auspiciousness, supremacy, intensification of the terrestrial “four”) can be applied to the symbolism of the eight steps in the paths completing the aims of both Yoga and Buddhism. The probability that “eight” not only signifies “completion” but the “perfection of completion” may be an additional factor influencing the use of this number in paths leading to enlightenment. A passage in the Aitareya Brāhmaṇa (1.29), seems to connect “perfection” (especially in the ritual), to the number “eight”.³⁸

It may be expected from all the foregoing that “eight” could well develop into a cosmic number having the particular connotation “surpassing terrestrial boundaries”. One of the earliest passages itemizing eight cosmic elements occurs in Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad 2.1.3. But nowhere is this meaning more prevalent than in the Sāṃkhya system, where Prakṛti (unevolved Matter) is eightfold. The Mahābhārata contains pre-classical Sāṃkhya passages which discuss the eight evolutes of Matter. Perhaps the clearest expression of this eightfold schema occurs in 12.298.10–15. Here the eight (productive) material evolutes (*prakṛti*- in the pl.) are declared. Seven (note the number), are manifest and the eighth or last one is unmanifest. The eighth is the original or primal prakṛti; it is the sum of the preceding seven principles plus the one that completes and surpasses the others. From the eighth, the Unmanifest, evolve first the Great One (*mahat*), next the I-faculty (*ahamkāra*), then the five subtle elements, namely ether, air, fire, water and earth. In the Liṅga Purāṇa (I.28.15–17), these five elements plus three others (the sacrificer, the sun and the moon), constitute the eight forms, or Aṣṭamūrti of god. Aṣṭamūrti represents god as the empirical and unified universe. Aṣṭamūrti symbolically captures the essential truth that Maheśa is Primordial Matter, otherwise known as Prakṛti. The Māṇḍhāl figure featuring eight heads (four facing the quadrants and one on each shoulder and one on each thigh) and the Parel statue are the two Aṣṭamūrti images I know and they date to the Gupta and post-Gupta periods, respectively. It is not surprising that Aṣṭamukha Liṅgas appear around the same time, since in the *śaiva* system of divine manifestation there is a causal connection between mukhas emanating from the Liṅga and the subsequent fully emergent figure. The two Aṣṭamukha Liṅgas from roughly the same periods come from Mandasor (Gupta period) and Burdwan (sixth century A.D.). The *vaiṣṇava* counterpoise is Aṣṭadhā Prakṛti, expressing the very same belief derived from early Sāṃkhya ideology.

Although both sects have deemed it necessary to ally (or better, identify) their godhead with eightfold Prakṛti, each expresses the concept in a different fashion. A *śaiva* Aṣṭamūrti expresses eightfoldedness by multiplying the head eight times; a *vaiṣṇava* Aṣṭadhā Prakṛti multiplies the arms. I am not convinced that this shift implies a major religious distinction. It may be that the multiplication of heads, or mukhas, is more germane to Śaivism, whereas the multiplication of arms, that is, an organ of action, is more germane to the *vīra* trait so dominant in the development and deification of Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa. These observations, though tinged with a surfeit of intellectual rationalization, should not

³⁸ Perhaps this “eight” is the result of “7” (the ritual number) + “1”. Cf. the discussion in Chapter 7, pp. 76–77 and note that the symbolic computation occurs again with Śiva in the interpretation of the Parel image (Chapter 11.C, pp. 154–155).

obscure the main point: both Śiva and Viṣṇu have eightfold forms in which the body of god equates with the empirical universe and in which the force of “eight” communicates a similar message. It is this: god encompasses, creates and surpasses all phenomenal boundaries; he reigns supreme as the perfection of material completeness.

It will be well to take notice, before discussing the language of three, that the conceptual properties of “four”, “five” and “eight” deduced from Sanskrit ritual and philosophic works read like a textbook illustration of a theory on number – formation proposed by Lucien Gerschel.³⁹ Taking his examples mainly from the ancient Egyptians and Indo-Europeans, Gerschel builds upon the proposition that a philosophy of numbers underlies the sequence of their numerical formation. The formation of a sequence, let us say 1–9, was devised by the ancients according to exigencies of notation which had little to do with the serial order in arithmetic. Though it may seem logical to us to postulate that the names of the numbers “one”, “two”, “three” etc. were invented in that sequence, Gerschel’s theory convinces that this was probably not the case. Certain numbers dominated, conceptually, over other numbers and thus their names came about first.

According to this theory, it is not at all accidental that the numbers 4, 5 and 8 should be so prominent in our discussion. These numbers dominate in the human experience of the ancients in the following ways:

The numbers 1–4 are discerned individually because their notation, by some symbolic convention (e.g. a line, a circle etc.) can be apprehended at a glance without resorting to counting.⁴⁰ These limitations of perception appear to be almost universally human. Schimmel notices the same thing: “Man darf nicht vergessen, dass in vielen Kulturen Vier eine obere Grenze Zählens ist – eine Handbreit sind vier Finger, vier Handflächen bilden einen Fuss. Oft findet man einen Bruch in den Zahlworten vor Vier, und mit Vier beginnt eine neue Gruppe von Zahlworten oder Beziehungen”.⁴¹ A consequence of this limitation is in the Sanskrit too, and it has been alluded to already several times. The first four numbers are declined in Sanskrit and the rest are not. Thus, 1–4 are conferred greater individuality than the rest which receive less characterization being devoid of gender. In this sequence, 4 has a special role since it is the last number in the numerical sequence whose notation is immediately perceptible to the eye (e.g. ||||, 0000). These features conferred upon 4 (as well as the preceding numbers), the quality of a real number; such a number, to repeat, can be readily associated with concrete, visible objects which can be quickly processed by the sense perceptions. Our finding that the language of “four” includes meanings relating to the human, visible sphere attains a rationale in a much larger context.

The number 5 has special importance since it is the first number after the last “real” number. This phenomenon is registered by Gerschel in the notion that 5 is a marginal

³⁹ L. Gerschel, “La Conquête du Nombre, Des modalités du compte aux structures de la pensée”, *Annales* Vol. XVII.2, 1962, 691–714.

⁴⁰ Gerschel, “Conquête du Nombre”, 692ff.; esp. 692–694.

⁴¹ Endres, Schimmel, *Zahl*, p. 106.

number; it results from the addition of "1" to "4". He defines a marginal number as a number which does not exist in its own right since it surpasses the last "real" (or, "visibly apprehensible") number. Having surpassed it, a marginal number gains a symbolic value having less to do with its arithmetic value than its imaginary value as a number of a higher order. Gerschel illustrates the nature of the marginal number with another example, namely the use of 3 in ancient Egypt.

The ancient Egyptians repeated an ideograph three times not to indicate three examples of the object represented but rather to connote the concept "plural". The number 3 in this way conveyed the idea "more than two". In distinguishing the idea of "plural" from "dual", the arithmetic value of 3 is inoperative.⁴²

In our discussion, the number 5 has a marginal not an arithmetic value. 5 is conceptualized on the "x plus one" formula. The resultant conceptualizations associate 5 with an invisible (meta-physical) sphere above a phenomenal reality which the quadrants enclose. This meaning functions in the fifth mukha of the Linga which early on in *śaiva* iconography is rarely represented visibly because of its association with a sphere beyond even the ken of the yogīs (thus, certainly above ordinary human perception).

The distinction that Gerschel attributes to 8 is that it is the last number directly related to 4. 8 comes about by a doubling of 4. Indo-European linguistics demonstrates that the doubling of 4 underlies the numerical and conceptual assessment of 8. After the first four numerals, only 8 has an ending; the number is given a dual ending.⁴³ It is the doubling process which accounts thus for the formation of the 8: ||||; 0000; 4 + 4
 |||| 0000

The doubling process can, according to Gerschel, also be applied to 4, and of course Vedic evidence would agree "... four means a couple, for a couple means two-and-two. . . ."⁴⁴ These theoretical considerations on the number "eight" are exemplified by our findings. The dominant meaning of "eight" implies the surpassing of "four", where "four" stands for "terrestrial boundaries".

The special importance of the numbers "five" and "eight" in relation to "four" (or better, the sequence 1-4) allows Gerschel to postulate that the names of the numbers 5 and 8 succeeded those for 1 through 4, and preceded those for 6 and 7. Without pursuing this postulate too far, it may be observed in passing that "6" and "7" are numbers of limited importance in the multiplication of bodily parts in early Indian literary and artistic traditions. Indeed, the depiction of six bodily parts may be approached with some caution in early representations.⁴⁵ It could signal a modern misconception of what was permissible and normative in antiquity.

Next is the number "three". The conceptual properties of "three" are of interest for the significance of Śiva's third eye in early Indian art. In the present context, there is no reason to delve into the language of "three" to clarify the multiple heads of either Śiva

⁴² Gerschel, "Conquête du Nombre", 697.

⁴³ Gerschel, "Conquête du Nombre", 699.

⁴⁴ This is part of the quotation from ŚB 1.9.2.6, given above.

⁴⁵ Cf. remarks on the Gupta terracotta in Chapter 20; fn. 45.

or Viṣṇu, since in both cases, it is probably a question of four or five heads, not three, even though only three heads may be visible. In Śaivism, the literary evidence stipulates that Sadāśiva/Maheśa can have five heads or one head, numbers which are not so different symbolically. It will be remembered that already Indo-European terminology shows the connection between “five” fingers and the “one” hand. No textual passage can be cited which specifically assigns three heads to Śiva. In the same way, there are no tricephalic representations of Śiva – barring those on Northwestern sculptures and the coins of Huviṣka and Vāsudeva I which cannot at present be commented upon authoritatively – that should be read as true three-headed figures. Viṣṇu, too, is not directly related to three heads in religious texts perused in this study. He is associated with four heads as the *caturvyūha* concept and artistic form readily confirm.⁴⁶ Indeed very few deities are explicitly assigned three heads in the Vedic textual tradition.

A quick perusal of the Vedic examples of three-headedness is instructive. Gonda in his monograph on *Triads in the Veda*⁴⁷ notes that three heads or three faces are ascribed to the following entities: the bull Viśvarūpa, noxious worms, the demon Viśvarūpa, the god Soma and the god Agni (who is also ascribed three heads under the name of Narāśamsa).⁴⁸ The entities seem to fall into two groups: demonic deities, reviling creatures and holy divinities.⁴⁹ Three-headedness of Soma probably refers to the god’s omnipresence in the tripartite world; in addition, Agni’s three heads probably also symbolize the three Vedic altars. Now, it is of course undeniable that characteristics of Agni filtered into the development of both Rudra-Śiva and Viṣṇu. However, the notion of five heads or mukhas is consistently associated with Rudra-Śiva from the time of the Agnicayana ritual wherein the identity of between Agni and Rudra-Śiva is vigorously declared; therefore it seems quite unlikely that Agni’s three-headedness would be adapted into the imagery of Rudra-Śiva. The degree of influence Agni has left on Vedic Viṣṇu’s imagery is not as clearly discernible; therefore, some possibility exists that three heads on a Viṣṇu image may reverberate with the symbolism of “three” in addition to “four”.⁵⁰

The only bodily part to capitalize on the language of “three” is the extra eye belonging preeminently to Śiva. The significance of the extra eye in the Bhagavad Gītā (11.8) can be explained by recourse to the “x plus one” formula. Having one more eye in addition to the normal pair of eyes enables vision surpassing the ordinary. Three eyes empowers one to see and grasp the extra-ordinary. That is precisely the momentary power given to Arjuna in the Bhagavad Gītā.

⁴⁶ It may be noted that in the sixth century Deogarh Viṣṇu Viśvarūpa, the god has five heads. However, it has already been determined in Chapter 11 that the critical aspect in *viśvarūpa* iconography is not the specific number of a multiple bodily part, but rather the intensification of (i.e. the representation of two or more) multiple bodily parts. The Deogarh Viśvarūpa is illustrated in T.S. Maxwell, *Viśvarūpa*, Pl. 63.

⁴⁷ In *Verhandelingen der Koninklijke Nederlandse Akademie van Wetenschappen, Afd. Letterkunde, Nieuwe Reeks*, Deel 91, Amsterdam, Oxford, New York, 1976.

⁴⁸ Gonda, *Triads*, pp. 105–106.

⁴⁹ Interestingly, Schimmel (*Mysterium der Zahl*, pp. 82–92) describes the same groupings connected with “three” in a broad range of examples, going from the Trinity and three holy men in Christianity to demonic three-legged animals described in the German literature of the Middle Ages.

⁵⁰ See the analyses of the Śāmalājī and Gaḍhwā Viśvarūpa images in Chapter 11.B, pp. 138–141.

The number “three” in the Gītā functions as a marginal number somewhat analogously to the ancient Egyptian example offered by Gerschel. In the Gītā however, the extra or third eye does not just connote “more than two”. The third eye signifies the attainment of a higher order of perception and knowledge than is otherwise possible. “Three” is “the higher synthesizing unity of . . . two other entities. . . .”⁵¹ The way “three” is used in the concept of the “third eye” is that it represents the “one” that surpasses “a pair”, and this usage has added significance. Vedic literature shows extensive use of a complementary pair to denote the completeness, or wholeness, of the pair. The tendency to form duals in order to distinguish categories and express dichotomies is characteristic when discussing Vedic objects and phenomena.⁵² In post-Vedic thought, the tendency to describe all physical aspects by way of pairs of opposites becomes pronounced. Therefore, to extend a pair by one intimates that the resultant object or action is above the phenomenal and the ordinary. In other words, “three” gains the significance of the para-physical and the ideal. Schimmel calls “three” the comprehensive synthesizer which points in the same direction.⁵³

“Three” as “ideal” also operates, as Gonda shows, in the Buddhist notion of the “middle way”. Actually, the “middle way” is a “third way” which avoids the pairs of extremes, asceticism and over-indulgence.⁵⁴

The language of three dictates that Śiva’s third eye is emblematic of the god’s para-physical perception and knowledge, specifically his yogic awareness of the nature of all things. The Anuśāsana Parvan of the Mahābhārata says it best when describing the greatness of Mahādeva: “Having the divine eye, he has great fiery powers; with his eye of *yoga* he discerns [all]”.⁵⁵ Mahābhārata 3.156.6 assigns to a “Law-wise” ascetic the divine third eye; thus it is another instance where the third eye is symbolic of yogic super-sensory powers. The correlation between a surcharge of knowledge derived from a surcharge of eyes is a favorite theme throughout the Vedic tradition, although the imagery involves “a thousand” or “four” eyes, not three.⁵⁶ By the time of the epic, the ability to see and know all carries the added connotation of “seeing that which transcends phenomenal reality”. There is another instance in the Mahābhārata when Arjuna receives the extra eye. Mahādeva bestows it upon him and then says “Look at me”. Here, as in the Gītā, Arjuna’s extra eye enables him to get a glimpse of a vision outside of the limitations of phenomenal reality. He sees god’s *viśvarūpa* body.⁵⁷

The Purāṇas continue to associate Śiva’s divine eye with his perfected yogic powers.⁵⁸

⁵¹ J. Gonda, *Triads*, p. 8 and fn. 22.

⁵² J. Gonda, *Triads*, p. 9.

⁵³ A. Schimmel, *Zahl*, pp. 72ff., esp. p. 74.

⁵⁴ J. Gonda, *Triads*, p. 9.

⁵⁵ *divyacakṣurmahātejā vīkṣyate yogacakṣuṣā*; 13.14.2. This description is not in the critical text but in the notes under 13.4; see 73* line 16, p. 75 in the critical edition.

⁵⁶ See Chapter 2, p. 26, fn. 8 and pp. 30–31. Note for example that Agni’s four eyes in RV 1.31.13, indicate his ability to scan and know all on the horizontal plane.

⁵⁷ Cf. Jacques Scheuer, *Śiva dans le Mahābhārata*, Paris, 1982, Vol. 84 in Bibliothèque de l’Ecole des Hautes Etudes, Section des Sciences Religieuses; p. 217, fn. 21.

⁵⁸ Cf. W. Doniger O’Flaherty, “The Symbolism of the Third Eye of Śiva in the Purāṇas”, *Purāṇa* XI, 1969, 274.

With the energy radiating from the third eye, Śiva destroys Kāla, Kāma, Dakṣa's sacrifice, Tripura and Andhaka.⁵⁹ But now, the third eye is also symbolic of eroticism. At the wedding of Śiva with Pārvatī, his third eye may remain, or it be transformed into a *tilaka*, or Śiva may present himself with two eyes.⁶⁰

The early plastic evidence does not portray the divine eye's erotic connotation so clearly. When there is a sharp distinction between eroticism and asceticism in an icon of Śiva, chances are greater that the third eye is associated with asceticism. Two images of Śiva with Umā sum up the situation. In the earliest dated Umāsaḥitamūrti (probably c. 387/8? A.D. from Kauśāmbī), Śiva is shown with all the trappings of an ascetic (Pl. 12.2). His hair is worn *jaṭāmukuta* fashion; he is *ūrdhwaretas*; he carries the *akṣamālā* and the priests' water pot (*kamaṇḍalu*); a *yajñopavīta* crosses his chest but very few other adornments are on his body. By the stance of the two deities there is no hint of an emotive relationship between them. Śiva is the Yogī *par excellence* here, and he has a third eye horizontally positioned on his forehead. The sixth century depiction of the marriage of Śiva and Pārvatī at Elephanta shows a manly groom; the god is responsive to the physical beauty and tender feelings of the nubile bride at his side (Pl. 12.3). In this scene, with its erotic overtones, the third eye does not appear on Śiva's brow. Thus, the more erotic the context, the less likely it is for the third eye to play a part. The third eye becomes more frequent in Gupta images, especially if the context is ambiguous. For example, in a Kuṣāṇa relief from Mathurā, Śiva as the amorous-ascetic embraces his spouse (No. G 52 in the Mathura Museum).⁶¹ He is two-armed, ithyphallic and his left arm encircles the shoulders of Umā. There is no depiction of a third eye. A two-sided Gupta Umāsaḥitamūrti from Mathurā (No. 2084 in the Mathura Museum) also shows Śiva as the amorous-ascetic on both sides.⁶² He is again ithyphallic and his two arms are poised as in the earlier sculpture; he has the *jaṭāmukuta*, is dressed in an animal skin and is decked with ornaments including an *upavīta* in the guise of a double garland. Now a small vertical eye appears on his forehead. In the world of *līlā*, the sharp distinctions between the erotic and the ascetic melt. Tensions explicit in yogic practices resulting from erotic containment relax. Possibly this shift is reflected in iconography.

To conclude, the significance of Śiva's third eye relates to the language of "three", especially the meaning inhering in "three" as surpassing "a pair". The extra eye which is literally and figuratively above the normal pair is the spiritual eye of Yoga. It emits a fiery radiance. It takes in all there is to see and know. It completes and surmounts the capabilities of the normal pair of eyes. Emblazon on the brow of Śiva it announces the unique powers of the Lord of Yogīs.

⁵⁹ Skanda Purāṇa 1.1.34.130-139.

⁶⁰ O'Flaherty, "Third Eye", 281-283.

⁶¹ See G. Kreisel, *Śiva-Bildwerke*, Fig. 102.

⁶² See Kreisel, *Śiva-Bildwerke*, Figs. 106a-b.

PART TWO

FORM. ICONOGRAPHIC STUDIES

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

DOES THE MULTIPLICITY CONVENTION BEGIN IN THE INDUS CIVILIZATION?

The answer to the question in the title of this chapter is both yes *and* no: Yes, there are some examples of the multiplicity convention in the Indus assemblage. No, these examples cannot be considered as the forerunners of the phenomenon investigated in this work.

The examples show a multiplication of one bodily part, namely the head. One group, seen on the Indus seals, is that of composite or superimposed animals which may have various numbers of heads. The range of animal type and numbers of heads varies, but the commonest type appears to be a three-headed composite animal which probably is also represented by a fragmentary sculpture from Mohenjo-daro.¹ A seal from the Mature Harappan Period at Amri illustrates the tricephalic animal type well² (Pl. 13.1). The fantastic creature has one body from which grow three separate heads with horns. The heads of this creature seem to represent a bull, a unicorn and an antelope. In principle, there is a difference between a creature with multiple body parts that are different, and a creature with multiples of the same body part. Therefore this seal with its various multiple heads is probably not illustrative of the convention investigated here. Further, it is difficult to ally these multi-headed animal forms (whether composite or superimposed) to the earliest full-scale literary or artistic occurrences of the convention. In the arts, multiplicity is not applied to animals; initially, it is restricted to anthropomorphic figures.³ The earliest literature, in the main, attests to the same restriction, although two important Rig Vedic exceptions need to be commented upon. One is the primordial Asura Bull who is *viśvarūpa* ("Omniform") and has three bellies and three udders (RV 3.56.3). These attributes mark him as an androgynous procreative Power, capable of giving birth to all forms of life. Three heads (or any number of multiple heads), are not attributed to the Asura Bull, making it unlikely that the Asura Bull has some connection with the "various monstrosities"⁴ depicted on the Indus seals. But the Rig Veda is not without its own "monstrosities," that is, demonic forms with multiple parts. One of these is a demon called Viśvarūpa who has three heads (*triśīrṣan*), six eyes and seven rays.⁵ I doubt whether any linkages exist between this demon (whose father, Tvaṣṭṛ, is one of the oldest creator gods in the Rig Veda) and the seals' tricephalic creatures, which have no signs of

¹ See Sir Mortimer Wheeler, *The Indus Civilization* Third Edition, Cambridge 1968, pp. 104 and 88.

² See J.M. Casal, *Fouilles d'Amri II* Paris 1964, Pl. 27D. The seal is dated to Phase III C ("Mohenjo-daro tardif"). H. Heras reports a surprisingly similar three-headed animal image from the historic period in "Three Headed Animals in Mohenjo-daro," *Annals of the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute* 23, 1942, 187-195.

³ I know of no examples of a theriomorphic image with multiple bodily parts from earliest through Gupta times.

⁴ Wheeler, *The Indus Civilization*, p. 104.

⁵ RV 10.8.8 etc. See Chapter 2, fn. 2.

procreative powers. But even were this a possibility, the consequences of a such a possibility are unrelated to the larger phenomenon of the origin of the multiplicity convention. Demonic Viśvarūpa is not central to the multiplicity phenomenon. The marginality of Viśvarūpa, both to the later Hindu Viśvarūpa forms as well as to the early Hindu expressions of multiplicity, is best expressed by a scholar such as Ratan Parimoo, who is intuitively aware of the possibilities and parameters that the culture can allow: "The fact that Trīśīras" [i.e. the Vedic Viśvarūpa Trīśīras], "was tricephalic does not explain the feature of multiple heads. Multi-headed aspect of Indian deities is a larger phenomenon and cannot be explained just by giving examples of mythic characters. It would not be one single myth having a Vedic source which was enlarged upon subsequently, but rather converging and commingling of series of mythic motifs from the Vedic period onwards resulting into a total and unified concept."⁶

Besides the group of multi-headed animals, there are two fragments with anthropomorphic multiple heads. A Mohenjo-daro pottery double head (Pl. 13.2) was found in the lower levels of G section in DK area.⁷ The heads are back to back and look straight outward in opposite directions. Mackay notes that these faces are exactly alike and seem to have been made in the same mold. The noteworthy facial features are the obliquely set, rounded eyes; Mackay compares these to the Mongolian-type eyes found on several of the horned masks also coming from the same Mohenjo-daro levels.⁸ The heads are separated by a projection which may represent hair or a fan-shaped headdress. It is evident from the fracture at the base of the neck that the double head was, originally, part of a figure. The remains of a double head from Kalibangan (Pl. 13.3) does not seem to be similar to the Mohenjo-daro double head. The Kalibangan lateral heads look upwards and there is no central projection. The piece is poorly preserved and the features are so washed out that the faces are devoid of any special character. The eyes are small indentations; the noses are broken. The mouths are wide and the lower lip appears pendulous on the right face. There is no indication of hair. The Indus assemblage contains no other convincing multiplicity examples.

The figure on Mohenjo-daro seal No. 420 (Pl. 13.4) cannot be considered a convincing example. Perhaps my arguments, published in '75-'76 and '84⁹ against a tricephalic figure on this seal are beginning to be accepted. Not too many recent studies continue to call the seal's figure a "Proto-Śiva," rejecting thereby Marshall's package of proto-Śiva features, including that of three heads.¹⁰ The thrust of my argument against the views of

⁶ "Some Thoughts on the Sculptures of Viśvarūpa Viṣṇu," in *Vaiṣṇavism in Indian Arts and Culture*, Ratan Parimoo ed. New Delhi 1987, p. 356. This is a response to the theory proposed by T.S. Maxwell, "Transformational Aspects of Hindu Myth and Iconology, Viśvarūpa," *Art & Archaeology Research Papers IV*, London, Dec. 1973.

⁷ E.J.H. Mackay, *Further Excavations at Mohenjo-daro*, New Delhi 1938, Vol. I, p. 268, Vol. II, Pl. 76.8.

⁸ Mackay, *Further Excavations II*, Pls. 76.2, 3, 4. Another horned mask with oblique eyes was found on the surface of the HR area of Mohenjo-daro by G.F. Dales, see *Archaeology*, Vol. 18, No. 2 (Summer 1965), 145.

⁹ D.M. Srinivasan, "The So-Called Proto-Śiva Seal from Mohenjo-daro: An Iconological Assessment," *Archives of Asian Art XXIX*, 1975-1976, 47-58, D.M. Srinivasan, "Unhinging Śiva from the Indus Civilization," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 1984, 77-89.

¹⁰ E.g. cf. A. Hiltebeitel, "The Indus Valley 'Proto-Śiva' Reexamined through Reflections on the Goddess,

Sir John Marshall, expressed in the 1920s, is based on more recent remains which shed new light on the seal's iconography. What appeared to Marshall as lateral profiles issuing from a central face can now be reinterpreted as possible ears of a face having pronounced bovine characteristics. The bovine features become predominant when the face on seal No. 420 is compared with 1) a configuration on a pre-Indus vessel coming from Kot Diji; 2) a horned mask from Mohenjo-daro; 3) a bull figurine found in the Harappan levels at Kalibangan. The terracotta bull from Kalibangan has a dewlap whose design recalls the series of linear incisions which contour the face on the seal (Pl. 13.5).¹¹ The Kalibangan bull figurine opens up the possibility that bovine traits occur in the facial features of the figure on the seal. The possibility is borne out by a horned mask from Mohenjo-daro which depicts a humanized bovine (Pl. 13.6). The profile of this mask shows a creature that is neither completely anthropomorphic nor completely theriomorphic. It is this blending of characteristics which compares well with the features seen on the face of seal No. 420. Indeed were the facial characteristics of the 420 figure projected into profile, they would show a definite similarity with the pottery mask in respect to the vanishing brow, the small lozenge-shaped eyes, the snout-like nose and the slight indication of a dewlap. Another humanized bovine specimen is painted on a Kot Diji vessel (Pl. 13.7a); its features directly anticipate those on the Mohenjo-daro seal. The rectangular facial frame and the relation of horns to head is markedly similar (Pl. 13.7b). It is this specimen's flap-like ears which suggest that the lateral projections on the face of the Mohenjo-daro seal could equally well be ears; however, the significance of the extensions below the "ears" on the 420 face remains unresolved.¹² Nonetheless, the cumulative evidence goes against the tricephalic feature Marshall ascribed to the "Proto-Śiva," and in its place there emerges the manly face of a bovine who is likely to be a buffalo-man.¹³ His headdress marks him as a fertility figure; it is composed of buffalo horns and a plant motif for which there appears to be indigenous precedence.¹⁴ His yoga-like posture is repeated on a set of related seals and sealings, some of which indicate that the figure in this posture receives worship.¹⁵ So it may be that the figure on seal No. 420 is a divine buffalo-man. Once doubt is cast upon the proto-Śiva identification and its tricephalic component, it becomes increasingly difficult to maintain that this feature is found on any of the other related Indus or pre-Indus pieces.

As such, the question "Does the multiplicity convention begin in the Indus?" has to be answered with reference mainly to the two double headed fragments mentioned above.

the Buffalo and the Symbolism of the Vāhanas," *Anthropos* 73, 1978, 767-797, S. Kramrisch. *The Presence of Śiva*, Princeton 1981, pp. 10-13, Yan Y. Dhansky, "The Indus Valley Origin of a Yoga Practice," *Artibus Asiae* Vol. 48 1/2, 1987, 87-108.

¹¹ A detailed analysis is in Srinivasan, "So-Called," 51-55.

¹² E.g. K.N. Sastri (*New Light on the Indus Civilization*, Delhi, 1957, p. 8) sees here an ornament or amulet. A painted horn with white filling on a small drinking cup from Rehman Dheri is similar to the Kot Diji design and could suggest the beginnings of the cult to a horned deity in the Proto-Kot-Dijian phase. F.A. Durrani, "Rehman Dheri and the Birth of Civilization in Pakistan," *Bulletin of the Institute of Archaeology*, No. 18, 1981, 201; Fig. 6.9.

¹³ See Hildebeitel, "The Indus Valley 'Proto-Śiva,'" 771-773.

¹⁴ Srinivasan, "So-Called," 49-51, and "Unhinging Śiva," 78-81.

¹⁵ See Srinivasan, "So-Called," 55-56.

The two pieces are both rare and atypical in the Indus cultural complex, being the only examples of anthropomorphic multiplicity I know in a culture comprising about 500 Mature Harappan sites and lasting approximately 500–700 years (the latest dates given to the Mature Phase are c. 2500–2000 B.C., and probably not more than 2600–1900 B.C.). Equally significant and already intimated by Parimoo is that when the convention actually does appear, it is not limited to heads. In the Rig Veda, it begins with an effusion of different sorts of multiple bodily parts. Approximately seventy passages describe divinities with multiple heads, faces, mouths, arms, feet, bellies, backs, bodies, testicles (see Chapter 2). In the same way, when the convention begins in earnest in Kuṣāṇa art, gods have multiple heads, eyes and arms. What is more, dicephalism is atypical.¹⁶ One example comes from the *śaiva* sector; it is the Kuṣāṇa Dvimukha Liṅga in the Mathura Museum (Pl. 19.21).¹⁷ The other dicephalic examples, cited below for the sake of completeness, do not look like images of gods, much less creator gods, the major initial criterion distinguishing those beings adorned with the multiplicity convention from those who are not.

To date, three post-Indus, dicephalic pieces are known to me. One Janus-like head in the Bharhut style is now in the Museum für Indische Kunst, Berlin (No. I.10.126; Ht. 11 cm.; Pl. 13.8). The double-faced sandstone head is covered with a turban, but the head fails to convey a sense of royalty or divinity. Even more enigmatic is the bicephalic carved stone in the Asmolean Museum (Pl. 13.9–11; "Museum No. x 267; Ht. c. 4"), whose provenance is unknown. The larger of the two heads has a smile and a large hole in the forehead. The second head is smaller and tilts upward. From the Kuṣāṇa period comes a crudely modeled double faced terracotta (Pl. 13.12–13).¹⁸ A torque, embossed with indentations, circles the neck. The portion below the neck probably joined to a separate body which is now missing. These examples, isolated occurrences of a non-diagnostic nature, neither place the Indus pieces into a meaningful contest, nor relate cogently to the multiplicity phenomenon. There appears to be no bridge between the Indus double heads and the polycephalic innovations in early Indian art.

As for the impetus behind the Indus pieces, perhaps more can be understood if these pieces can relate to double headed figures in the Mesopotamian context. Briefly it may be noted that cylinder seals of the Akkadian Period (2330–2180 B.C.) frequently depict a double-headed minor god called Isimu and Us(u)mû, formerly Uzumia and Usmu,¹⁹ who is the minister or messenger of the high god, Ea, the Water God.²⁰ The appearance

¹⁶ Discounted of course are addorsed images (e.g. Kuvera, No. C 25 in the Mathura Museum; the Yakṣis, No. 71.15 in the Cleveland Museum), which are not examples of the multiplication of a body part but are rather two separate figures back to back.

¹⁷ It must quickly be registered that the two Indus double heads do not have the appearance of incipient Dvimukha Liṅga forms.

¹⁸ State Museum, Lucknow No. 60. 15/14; see description in *Bulletin of Museums & Archaeology in U.P.*, Dec. 1969, pp. 31–32.

¹⁹ See A. Ungnad, "Der Babylonische Janus," *Archiv für Orientforschung*, Vol. 5, 1928–1929, 185; A. Falkenstein, *Literarische Keilschrifttexte aus Uruk*, Berlin, 1931, p. 18, fn. 17.

²⁰ Often he introduces a personage to the seated Ea. E.g., see E. Douglas van Buren, *The Flowering Vase and the God with Streams*, Berlin 1933, pp. 27–28, 47, 48–49, 65. *Corpus of Ancient Near Eastern Seals, The Collection*

of Isimu, occurs first in Akkadian cylinder seals and is characteristic of this period.²¹ The image of Isimu is also there in the art of the post-Akkadian city state of Tello, a time when the art of southern Mesopotamia revived Sumerian and Akkadian art traditions. A fragment from this time is now in the Berlin, Staatliche Museum (Pl. 13.14). It shows Isimu as part of a presentation scene that should have been larger.²² Comparative archaeological evidence testifies to trade contacts between Mesopotamian centers and Indus sites mainly during the Mature Indus Period.²³ Literary evidence from Mesopotamia also shows that merchants during the time of Sargon of Akkad (c. 2350 B.C.), and, most markedly during the time of the Third Dynasty of Ur (2130–2030 B.C.) and the Larsa dynasty (2030–1770 B.C.),²⁴ carried on trade with several foreign countries. One of these, Meluhha, is thought to be the Indus Valley or Western India. Thus trade contacts could be between 2350–1770 B.C., with maximum activity coinciding with the second half of the Mature Indus Period.²⁵ Perhaps the two double headed Indus pieces were produced locally,²⁶ under the influence of a type encountered through trade with the Near East.

Areas of continuity between the Indus Civilization and the later historic period no doubt exist, but the multiplicity convention is not one of them. Emphasis on water, prevalence of bulls and bull-like figures, indications of a tree-cult have all been recognized as prehistoric elements surviving in historical religious traditions; in this way are explained the presence of “tanks” with Hindu temples, the source of Nandi’s eminence, the sanctity of trees in Hinduism and Buddhism. The nude female depicted on an Harappan sealing has some similarity with the later Birth-Giving Goddess (Uttānapad) in religion and art.²⁷ The yogic posture seen on several seals (e.g. Pl. 13.4), indicates that a yoga practice may well have originated in the Indus Civilization.²⁸ But that finding cannot establish the

of the *Pierpont Morgan Library*, Edith Porada ed., Vol. II, Washington, D.C., 1948, Nos. 198 E, 200, 202, 204. R.M. Boehmer, *Die Entwicklung der Glyptik während der Akkad-Zeit*, Berlin, 1965, Pls. 43–44 and pp. 88ff.

²¹ Boehmer, *Glyptik*, p. 88.

²² A. Moortgat, *The Art of Ancient Mesopotamia*, London and New York, 1969, p. 72 and Fig. 191. The publication which succeeds in putting the piece into a comprehensive and coherent context is: J. Borker-Klahn, *Alt Vorderasiatische Bildstelen und vergleichbare Felsreliefs* (Baghdader Forschungen 4), Mainz 1982, pp. 21, 24, 145, No. 49, Plate A. Dr. R.-B. Wartke of the Vorderasiatisches Museum, Berlin, gave helpful information on this piece.

²³ B. and R. Allchin, *The Rise of Civilization in India and Pakistan*, Cambridge, 1982 pp. 187–188.

²⁴ The dates for the Akkadian Period, Sargon of Agade and the Third Dynasty of Ur tally with the rather fluid chronological chart contained in Hans J. Nissen, *The Early History of the Ancient Near East 9000–2000 B.C.* Chicago, 1988, Figure 56. On the trade issue, see Allchin and Allchin, *Rise*, p. 129.

²⁵ Allchin and Allchin, *Rise*, pp. 217–219.

²⁶ A local manufacture of the Indus pieces may be suggested based on the “Mongolian” eyes on the Mohenjo-daro double head (Pl. 13.2), and its relation to the Mohenjo-daro horned human masks (above), which appear to have no foreign parallels.

²⁷ It is premature to speak of a continuity. The nude female is shown upside down with legs stretched wide apart, hands towards the knees and a plant issuing from her womb. See Sir John Marshall, *Mohenjo-daro and the Indus Civilization*, London 1931, Pl. 12.12. A closer comparison with the pose of the later Birth-Giving Goddess can be seen on an early Indus seal from Rehman Dheri. Here the female has drawn-up legs and is *not* upside down (see B. and R. Allchin, *Rise*, Fig. 6.18). On the Birth-Giving Goddess, see Chapter 15. Also, there is a sort of “pregnant male” in the Indus assemblage, but it combines male and animal attributes, distinguishing it from the later Kumbhodara Yakṣas described in Chapter 15. On the Indus male figurines, see George F. Dales, “Of Mice and Men,” *JAOs* 88, 1968, 19–20. Dales suggests possible Mesopotamian influence on the Indus examples.

²⁸ See Kramrisch, *Presence*, pp. 10–14, cf. Dhyansky, “Origins,” 89–108. It is intriguing that no convincing

origin of the idea “Śiva as yogī” (or as “the father of yoga”) in the Indus Civilization.²⁹ The medley of *śaiva* characteristics that have been read into the figure on seal 420 ever since Marshall’s analysis, can, for the present, be explained without resorting to Śaivism.³⁰ Likewise, certain cones and ring stones cannot be considered, as Marshall once proposed, as *lingas* and *yonī* ring stones.³¹ In short, it does not seem possible, from currently available evidence, to begin “the world of Śiva” and the phenomenon of “thinking multiplicity” in the prehistoric period of the subcontinent’s culture.

match has so far been made between the yogic pose on the seal and one from the classic yoga tradition. The figure’s feet are not in a convincing Padmāsana position. The figure’s arms are not in the Mūlabandhāsana suggested by Dhyanis, even though the legs and feet of this āsana seem to be like those on the seal (cf. B.K.S. Iyengar, *Light on Yoga*, London 1966, see Photos 459–463). Kramrisch (*Presence*, p. 10), considers the feet to be crossed in the posture on the seal, and this is not seen in the Mūlabandhāsana.

²⁹ Unfortunately, this point is blurred by Dhansky, “Origins,” who cites the Śiva Saṃhitā for Śiva’s appellation as the father of yoga. But this is a tantric yoga text and therefore its ability to comment usefully on cultural innovations in the Indus is quite limited, if at all applicable.

³⁰ See Srinivasan, “Unhinging Śiva” and “So-Called.”

³¹ See Srinivasan, “Unhinging Śiva,” 83–87.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

RITUAL AS ICON

“Early Brahmanism concentrated on a highly developed ritual of sacrifices using a complicated system of signs and symbols, an iconography without icons”.

A.K. Coomaraswamy, “The Origin of the Buddha Image”.

The history of Indian art opens with a well-acknowledged puzzle. While the earliest phase, religious in nature, is archaic in style, the iconography is not primitive. Hindu stone images first appearing in the several centuries around the Christian era demonstrate an iconographic language which is direct, stable and mature. It is the same with the first Hindu images employing the multiplicity convention. The convention is used in a confident, unambiguous manner. Such usage promotes an expectation for antecedents. But none are forthcoming. As the preceding chapter demonstrates, antecedents have not come and are not likely to come from the Indus Valley material. Nor have any come from remains that are post-Indus and pre-Hindu. The full extent of this dilemma can be appreciated when the two earliest images with the multiplicity convention are considered. One is a *vaiṣṇava* image, the other a *śaiva* image. Both exhibit formulaic representations of the convention, although evidence for prior experimentation is lacking.

The earliest known *vaiṣṇava* image with multiple bodily parts has multiple arms and is dated by inscription to the first century B.C. (Pl. 14.1).¹ The image comes from Malhār (M.P.). Wearing a cylindrical crown, the four-armed god holds the wheel and mace in the upper left and right hands. The natural hands clasp an object, akin to the conch, close to the chest. This image, like the one of Viṣṇu coming from Sultānpur eleven hundred years later (Pl. 14.2), stems from Central India. In the later image, the same basic iconographic vocabulary is now imbued with majesty and the icon is carved with perfected skill; the wheel and mace achieve greater elegance in shape and there is greater clarity in the arrangement of the four arms. The tenth century image is not an anachronism. The point is that this medieval sculpture depicts a characteristic mode of representing Viṣṇu, and that mode had been worked out, in its essentials, in the first century B.C.

An even earlier image, from Bhīṭā in Uttar Pradesh, and dated by inscription to the second century B.C. has already solved a characteristic multiple form representing the god Śiva. The form is of a phallus with five heads (Pl. 14.3). The phallus is the sign (*linga*) of Śiva, heralding the god's capacity for cosmic creation. Śiva's *linga* can be an

¹ D.C. Sircar, “Burhikhar brāhmī Inscription”. *Proleg of the Indian Historical Congress*, 1953; pp. 39–41. The inscription is on the shaft of the mace.

object of worship in two modes of representation. It can be rendered as a plain *linga* or as a *linga* encircled by heads. The term for "head" in conjunction with *linga* is *mukha*;² so the second mode of representation is called "Mukhalinga". Religious theory imputes five (*pañca*) heads to every Mukhalinga (see Chapter 10). The resultant *linga* is called a Pañcamukha *Linga*. The way in which the heads are generally arranged on the shaft of the *linga* is as follows: four heads face in the four directions and the fifth occupies the central, uppermost position. The fifth head may "humanize" part or all of the shaft of the *linga*. The inscribed, five-headed Bhīṭā *Linga* is of this type. It is the earliest Pañcamukha *Linga* known to date. The central shaft is in the shape of the fifth head and its torso. Under the arms of the torso appear two heads. The head directly below the left hand of the torso has fanged teeth and a moustache. The features identify it as the fearful aspect of Śiva. The next face, under the right hand, is adorned with large globular earrings, a collar necklace and a fillet around the well-arranged hair. This face is the peaceful, feminine aspect of Śiva. Next follows a head wearing a turban with a topknot (Pl. 14.4). Last is a head devoid of hair and ornamentation (Pl. 14.4; right); it represents the ascetic nature of Śiva. The heads face in the directions. In subsequent ages, the fifth head is rarely fashioned. Considered to be superior, both physically and metaphysically, the fifth head is believed to be beyond the range of even the yogīs.³ It came to be symbolized by the dome of the *linga* of the Mukhalinga image. The resultant form consists of the *linga* encircled by four heads. Such an image has persisted throughout the history of *śaiva* art. An example of a Pañcamukha *Linga* with four visible heads comes from a private American collection (Pl. 14.5). In this sculpture of the seventh century, continuities are not hard to find. The heads face in the four directions. The fearful mien and the peaceful mien remain, as do the latter's fillet around the hair and the single-strand necklace.

That forms as complex as a phallus with five heads and a god with four arms could burst upon the scene without any artistic precedence whatsoever must be seen as rather remarkable. After all, both forms are highly idiosyncratic, and what is more, both forms are totally within the mainstream of Hindu religious art. Puzzles of this sort are usually approached by an *argumentum ex silentio*. It is postulated that extant images in stone were preceded by earlier ones in wood. Since wood quickly perishes in the subcontinent's climate, a gap in the historical evidence has occurred. This postulate is exemplified by Indian stone architecture, contemporaneous with, or even earlier than the stone images just considered.

The first phase of Indian architecture includes rock-cut caves in imitation of wooden forms. The Lomas R̥ṣi Cave of the mid-third century B.C. is a good illustration (Pl. 14.6). Situated in the Barābar Hills in Bihar, the Cave's façade features an arch, shaped on a bent-wood prototype. The pediment is decorated in two registers, of which the upper band is carved in imitation of wooden lattice work. By the mid-second century B.C., the entrance arch has developed a more lithic and impressive form, as seen in the

² *Mukha* can mean "head, face, mouth, front" that is, the forepart or top of something.

³ See *Rūpamaṇḍana* IV.94.

rock-cut Cave from Bhaja in Western India (Pl. 14.7), but almost every other feature continues to imitate a free-standing wooden structure. It is easy to recognize a wholesale translation from wood into stone in the forms of the beams below the central arch, in the forms of the mock balconies and the false window frames, and in the lattice decoration. These two caves, and others excavated between the third century B.C. and the beginning of the Christian era, show an evolution wherein forms once dependent upon a wooden prototype develop into forms exploiting the new stone medium.⁴ It is hard to detect a similar trend in Hindu devotional images arising during the same period.

There are to date no satisfactory plastic antecedents for the earliest Hindu images in stone, and this despite vigorous archaeological activity to define materially the preceding culture.⁵ The dominant culture throughout the first millenium B.C. is Vedism. Vedism represents more than a codified set of religious beliefs described in the Vedas. Vedism fostered the supremacy of Sanskrit, societal groupings into the four basic classes, societal norms of conduct and systematic inquiry into astronomy, grammar, metrics, phonetics, in addition to etymologies and metaphysics. Vedism also represents a certain spirit of elasticity that enabled constructive assimilation of non-Vedic elements present in the subcontinent. For example, the seeds of a *bhakti* outlook can certainly be detected in the Vedic Agnicayana ritual, whose Śatarudrīya hymn of praise to Rudra cannot fail but impress as an emotional chant foreshadowing the later Hindu *bhajan*. In recognition of the fact that the origins of Hinduism lie in Vedism. Renou has called the latter "ancient Hinduism".⁶ So we may say that ancient Hinduism formulated the precursors of Hindu Viṣṇu and Śiva, yet no archaeological evidence has surfaced to date to provide us with any iconic precursors – be they with or without multiple bodily parts. To date, no Vedic images have been identified.⁷

The lacuna is neither the result of happenstance digging nor that of vanished wood (or clay). There probably will never surface images of the Vedic gods, and this for several reasons. Vedic gods do have revelatory power, but images are not required to contain the revelation.

Vedic gods, just as the later Hindu gods, manifest their divine power on earth. The possibility for divine self-revelation is best contained in the term *dhāman*. *Dhāman* refers to "locations of the god's divine power" in the phenomenal world;⁸ it also refers to the manner in which god "locates" his power on earth. The deity projects a form (*rūpa*) from its transcendental self in an invisible sphere. A *rūpa*, containing god's distinctive power, is a form, though not an image. For example, the *rūpa* wherein god Soma locates his divine power on earth is the sacrificial soma juice.⁹ Viṣṇu's immortal *dhāman* may correspond to

⁴ See James Fergusson and James Burgess, *The Cave Temples of India*, London, 1880, pp. 27–94.

⁵ See Allchin and Allchin, *Rise*, Chapters 11–13 for a survey of the available information and related problems.

⁶ L. Renou, *Hinduism*, New York, 1961, p. 19.

⁷ There is little doubt that images were known before the earliest ones which have survived. Pāṇini (c. 400 B.C.), had knowledge of images of deities in his time (re: sūtra V.3.99). Whether these are Vedic images, and, moreover, Vedic images with multiple bodily parts, is rather doubtful (see below).

⁸ See Chapter 2, p. 29.

⁹ See Chapter 2, pp. 26–27.

the *axis mundi*.¹⁰ Agni has three *dhāmāni*¹¹ which may be fire (Agni), wind (Vāyu) and sun (Āditya);¹² the god may also have *sapta dhāmāni* which may be his locations in the sacrificial ritual fires. A Vedic god thus projects his numinous power into phenomena of nature, designated beings, authenticated objects, particular regions. Thereupon, they become “locations of the god’s divine power”. However, neither the act of transposition, nor the place or form of the manifestation requires an image.

An aniconic viewpoint is found within the Vedic tradition itself. A passage in Yāska’s Nirukta (c. 500 B.C.), debates a question relating to the probability of divine representation. The passage (7.6–7) is ambivalent as to whether Vedic gods are to be conceived as sentient beings because they are often eulogized in anthropomorphic fashion. However since gods can become manifest in non-anthropomorphic ways and since inanimate objects can be described in the same way as the gods, the Nirukta hedges on whether or not gods have corporeality.

Religious worship does not appear to need icons.¹³ Clearly the focus of the religion is elsewhere. The axel around which revolved the energies of the Vedic religion is the ritual of sacrifice.

Ancient Hinduism came to life with the performance of rituals, and these were often events of extraordinary visual power. The full impact of a ritual upon a participant or an observer cannot be gauged from reading one or even several Vedic texts describing it. A ritual, especially a public, that is a *śrauta*, ritual is an orchestration of much activity. A given *śrauta sūtra* describes only the activity undertaken by one priestly section. What is needed to gauge the impact is an overview of the activities in the total sacred space. Some of that effect is contained in a description of the Aśvamedha, the Horse Sacrifice, given in the Mahābhārata.¹⁴ The dates for the compilation of the Mahābhārata can only be approximated; but the generally agreed upon brackets are between 400 B.C. and 400 A.D.,¹⁵ placing the epic’s material within the historical periods of our concern. The Aśvamedha is one of the most imposing of Vedic ritual. The actual ritual lasts for three days, but preparations took a year, if not two. Here in the epic’s description is some indication of the pageantry, the crowd, the excitement, the ceremonies for which it took so long to prepare:

The sacrificial compound is prepared by knowledgeable master-builders, craftsmen and Brahmans who direct the proper ways in laying out the arena. On the selected spot, mansions and a broad avenue were constructed. Apartments, decorated in gold and jewels, were built for the nobles and their wives. Gateways and pillars of gold and vari-

¹⁰ See RV 3.55.10 in Chapter 2, p. 29.

¹¹ See J. Gonda, *The Meaning of the Sanskrit Term Dhāman*, Verhandelingen der Koninklijke Nederlandse Akademie van Wetenschappen, Afd. Letterkunde N.R. Deel 73.2. Amsterdam 1967; p. 23.

¹² Gonda, *Dhāman*, p. 23, citing Śata. Brāh. 6.3.5.16; 6.7.4.4 and Sāyaṇa.

¹³ On “aniconic” Vedic India see also the excellent discussion by Charles Malamoud “Briques et mots” in *Le temps de la réflexion* 1986 VII *Corps des Dieux* sous la direction de C. Malamoud et de J.-P. Vernant, Gallimard, 1986, pp. 77–79.

¹⁴ It is also described in the Rāmāyaṇa (I.12; I.13); this text indicates that invitation to attend the Horse Sacrifice went to members of all the four classes.

¹⁵ The *Mahābhārata*, trans. and ed. by J.A.B. van Buitenen, Vol. I, Chicago and London, 1973, pp. xxiii–xxv.

ous colours were raised. Nobles were invited from many different regions, bringing gems, women, horses, weapons; when they arrived they saw archways, walkways, seats and couches and very many bejeweled decorations. They saw refreshments in golden vessels. They saw pitchers, vessels, cauldrons, jars, lids. There was not anything to be seen which was not golden. The wooden sacrificial stakes were decorated with gold and erected according to the scriptures. There were dainty things to eat for the Brahmans and Vaiśya classes. The nobles were "wonderstruck" upon seeing the sacrificial compound with so many diverse types of animals tied to the sacrificial stakes. [These were sacrificed prior to the strangulation of the horse.]¹⁶

The passage is our gateway too; it reveals not only the sights to be seen but also who would be likely to see them. The spectators are drawn from the three upper classes of society. These comprise the Brahmans, or priests, the Kṣatriyas, or nobles, and the Vaiśyas, or merchants, agriculturists, artisans. Only the persons from the fourth class, the Śūdras, could not be in attendance.

The upper classes would also be performing their own domestic, or *grhya*, rituals, which were likewise charged with visual appeal. Instructions regarding appropriate colours and garments are included in the *grhya sūtras*, the manuals giving precise details on the way to perform domestic rituals. The need for a particular colour in a certain ritual stems from the symbolic and magical properties associated with colour. According to beliefs of man in ancient times, colour could transfer symbolic and magical properties unto another ritually designated object. So for example, a rain ritual requires a black horse, the use of black clothes, a black border of a garment, a black ram, a black antelope-skin, black rice and black honey.¹⁷ Or, in a ritual having a malevolent purpose, one should employ a red headband (see Ṛgvidhāna 2, 3, 5ff.); or wear an amulet with a red cord (Kauśika-sūtra 43,1) etc., since red, the colour of blood, can be considered a dangerous colour.¹⁸ The *grhya-sūtras* speak also of symbolic objects, gestures and movements which can transfer magical properties, or influence desired aims. "The garment of the consecrated should be new for the sake of unimpaired vigor" (*ayātayāmatāyai*; Śata. Brāh. 3.1.2.19).¹⁹ Posture is symbolic in the Saṃdhyā ritual, performed in antiquity to safeguard the sun's cyclic journey. The worshipper's posture, whether sitting at dusk or standing at dawn, expresses the desired outcome of Saṃdhyā.²⁰

As with the public rituals, the visual impact of some domestic rites also extended beyond the sacrificer, his wife and the officiating priest. Indication of a wider "audience" comes from the texts (e.g. Gobhila Gṛhyasūtra 2.2.14) which mention that "lookers-on" (*īkṣaka*) were present.²¹

The visual impact of the public and domestic rites goes well beyond the use of vivid colours, gestures, postures, precious gems and metals, ornamented clothes, architectural

¹⁶ Mahābhārata 14.86.11-26; 87.1-16.

¹⁷ Described in the Āgṇiveśya-Gṛhyasūtra 2, 5, 10; see Jan Gonda, *Vedic Ritual, The Non-Solemn Rites*, Leiden-Köln, 1980, p. 44.

¹⁸ Gonda, *Non-Solemn Rites*, pp. 45-46.

¹⁹ Gonda, *Non-Solemn Rites*, p. 48.

²⁰ See D.M. Srinivasan, "Saṃdhyā: Myth and Ritual", *Indo-Iranian Journal* Vol. XV.3, 1973, 161ff.

²¹ Gonda, *Non-Solemn Rites*, pp. 204-205; and fn. 40.

settings and appurtenances. Ritual altars and consecrated implements themselves had marked iconographic tendencies. A case in point is a clay pot which functions as an icon in a public ritual called the Pravargya. The pot is the most important implement in this ritual; its name is "Mahāvīra" which means "the large man, or, hero". The vessel is addressed as a supreme god and is set upon a throne which is named the "emperor's throne".²² The texts speak of the top as "the head", the middle as spheroid,²³ and the bottom as flat as "the two feet of the sacrifice".²⁴ One text states that "a mouth" is pinched for the head.²⁵ The terms used to describe the vessel and its shape suggest to van Buitenen, who studied this ritual, that the fairly tall Mahāvīra vessel was in the form of a large man seated upon a throne.²⁶ The possible appearance of the pot in antiquity is illustrated in Plate 14.8, being a drawing by van Buitenen in *The Pravargya* p. 11. The flat bottom, compared to the feet, could correspond to the crosslegged position; the spherical middle compares to the trunk, and the pinched top to the head of a man.²⁷ Enthroned and worshipped, the Mahāvīra pot functioned as an icon in the ritual.²⁸ Before the final destruction of this pot, near the end of the ritual, the shape of a man is fashioned on the altar using all manner of ritual apparatus, tools, containers and offering.

The ritual manipulation and worship of a pot presumed to be a god and endowed with figural properties, may be kept in mind when trying to comprehend why the dawn of Indian art includes small anthropomorphic and theriomorphic clay pots. Fashioned from c. the third century B.C. onwards,²⁹ these pots bid us to remember that small male and female pots, along with animals and other items, were made to be buried in the foundation of a Vedic ritual altar.³⁰ A male vessel from Sonkh (Mathurā Dist.) and prob-

²² J.A.B. van Buitenen, *The Pravargya*, Poona 1968, pp. 9 & 15.

²³ van Buitenen, *Pravargya*, p. 10.

²⁴ Stella Kramrisch, "The Mahāvīra Vessel and the Plant Putika", *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 95.2; 1975, p. 231 citing Āp. Ś.S. 15.2.14; Tait. Ār. 4.2.6.

²⁵ van Buitenen, *Pravargya*, p. 11.

²⁶ This is the position of van Buitenen (see note 22), who considers the Pravargya as an ancient Indian iconic ritual. L. Renou also sees the anthropomorphic tendencies in the vessel; he considers it to have the shape of a "human head"; see his *Vedic India*, trans. from the French by Philip Spratt, Delhi 1977, Paragraph 200. The latest mention of the Mahāvīra vessel is by Malamoud, "Briques" who considers its iconic properties (p. 83). In contradistinction, Kramrisch (see note 24), states that the vessel "is not an icon but a symbol in the shape of a vessel" p. 232.

²⁷ It must be registered that the Mahāvīra pot as it appears now-a-days is devoid of anthropomorphic tendencies (see van Buitenen, *The Pravargya* Pl. 3.1 and cf. Frits Staal, *Agni: The Vedic Ritual of the Fire Altar*; Berkeley 1983, Vol. I, Pl. 5B).

²⁸ This is not an isolated instance of a pot functioning as an icon in a ritual. The *śaiva* āgama entitled *Somasambhupaddhati* (c. 11th century), makes fairly frequent mention of the Śivakumbha. It is a pot full of water representing Śiva at the time of certain ceremonies. Specifically, the pot is understood as the *mūrti*, or body, of Śiva. See Hélène Brunner-Lachaux, *Somasambhupaddhati*, deuxième partie, Pondichery 1968, pp. 58ff. A vessel (kumbha) continues up to the present day, in South Indian *śaiva* temple rites, to have iconic overtones. See Fred W. Clothey, "The Yāga: A Fire Ritual of South India", in *Experiencing Śiva, Encounters with a Hindu Deity*, eds. Fred W. Clothey, J. Bruce Long, Columbia 1983, pp. 129ff. In this ritual, oblations are offered to a vessel representing Sūrya, to another vessel representing Soma, to four vessels representing the four Vedas etc., cf. also the ritual role of hollow *śaiva* hoods described in D.M. Srinivasan, "From Transcendence to Materiality: Para Śiva, Sadāśiva and Maheśa in Indian Art" *Artibus Asiae*, Vol. 5, 1/2; 138ff.

²⁹ In discussions with Shri M.C. Joshi, Archaeological Survey of India, he opined that the main period for the anthropomorphic pots is the 2nd century B.C. through the 2nd century A.D., and that their main distribution during that time is in the Doab.

³⁰ This is the Agnicayana ritual (see below). Six pairs of male and female pots are buried. In a recent

ably dating to the Mauryan Period has a wheel-thrown body (Pl. 14.9). The arms, nipples and genitals are hand modeled and added on.³¹ To the same period may be assigned two more anthropomorphic pots now in the collection of the Indian Museum. According to the Museum's register, one, a reddish-buff vessel, comes from Bhīṭā (No. A 10420; Pl. 14.10). The 4" pot takes on the shape of a fat bellied, squatting male whose arms and legs wrap around the pot (i.e. the belly). The head is broken, but there remains a necklace, indicated in high relief. A hole is on the shoulder, behind the neck and another is on the widest part of the pot; it may designate the navel or the penis. The second pot (4 1/2" ht.) comes from Taxila (No. A 11221; Pl. 14.11).³² Again the neck is ornamented and the arms circle the widest part of the pot, coextensive with the male's belly; a small animal is held in one of the hands. Purana Qila (Pl. 14.12) and Mathurā (Pls. 14.13 & 14) have also yielded anthropomorphic pots having the belly as widest part, and human limbs and organ appliquéd unto the surface. To get an idea of the original appearance of these anthropomorphic clay pots is not too difficult. There is, for example, a pot-figure completely intact in the Allahabad Museum (Pl. 14.15), whose vessel-shaped body is similar to the one from Bhīṭā seen in Pl. 14.10. The Catalogue states that the provenance of the piece is Buxar, that it is hand-modelled and fifteen cms. in height.³³ The tension between the shape of the pot and that of the figure is still maintained in the Buxar piece. Unlike this male pot which conserves the head on a body that betrays its origins from a pot (Pl. 14.15), the Russek Collection includes a Mathurā piece which is also intact but goes beyond the anthropomorphization of a pot (No. 575; Pl. 14.16). Nineteen cm. in height and of gray terracotta, the piece is a mutation, being somewhere between pot and figural form. Seen from the front, the form is that of an ungainly seated male. The head looks as if it were mould-made and attached (under the necklace?) to the hand-made bodily form. The long face and large, lenticular eyes are diagnostic of Mauryan terracotta faces.³⁴ Having small horns jutting from the head, a hunched posture, arms about a bulbous belly, a spout-like penis and dangling stumps as legs, there is a comic element in its ungainliness. Seen from the side, the figure's awkwardness is reduced because the

enactment of this ritual, the "unmarked pots are male; the female pots are marked with two breasts each", Staal, *Agni I*, pp. 404–409. Note also that a living tortoise is buried in the Agnicayana. The hollow clay vessel in the shape of a tortoise, found in the Mauryan levels at Sonkh (see Herbert Härtel, *Excavations at Sonkh*, Berlin 1993, p. 385 [II.62] and p. 364), would according to the thesis expounded below, be inspired by ritual exigencies. Professor Dr. Herbert Härtel's mention of this vessel in a discussion of anthropomorphic/theriomorphic vessels is gratefully acknowledged.

³¹ See Herbert Härtel, "Pottery of Mathurā" in *Mathurā: The Cultural Heritage*, ed. D.M. Srinivasan, New Delhi 1989, p. 185. It is circa 14 cms. and of reddish-grey colour. Another example from the Mauryan level at Sonkh is a small fragment of a female terracotta head. At the point of fracture, throw-marks are visible. The excavator presumes that the head was part of a vessel and compares it to a complete anthropomorphic vessel of a female in the Mathura Museum (which, in spite of my best efforts, it was not possible to locate). See Härtel, "Pottery", p. 185 and Pl. 20.II.C.

³² Cf. two other anthropomorphic pots from Taxila illustrated in Sir John Marshall, *Taxila* Vol. III, Reprint, Delhi, 1975, Plate 126: Nos. 184 & 185.

³³ S.C. Kala, *Terracottas in the Allahabad Museum*, New Delhi, 1980, p. 153; re: Fig. 133. Kala dates the piece to the 1st–2nd century A.D.

³⁴ See *Schatze Indischer Kunst*, Museum für Indische Kunst, Berlin 1984, Figures 2 & 3. Cf. these with Fig. 4 of the Śuṅga Period.

form is seen for what it really is: a pot-man (Pl. 14.17). There has recently come into the Russek Collection another small, grey terracotta Pot-Man from Mathura (No. 694 Isut). Probably used as some kind of libation vessel in a ritual, these pots permit us to envision the effect ritual implements may have had on the arising and distinctiveness of early figural forms. A Kuṣāṇa terracotta female from Sonkh has almost completed the transition from pot to figure, although she still retains a bottle shape. The terracotta (No. So IV 112, described in H. Härtel, *Sonkh*, p. 454, entry 12) is composed of a wheel-thrown body whose legs, arms, head, breasts and ornaments are modeled by hand and added on (Pl. 14.18). The female is a mother holding her babe on the left thigh. Between her legs, which are splayed and pendant, there is a hollow cuplike depression. Either it served as a libation container, or it emphasized some fertility aspect, or it did both, as I suspect. The main features of this Kuṣāṇa "mother" are echoed in a Kuṣāṇa stone image now in the Ashmolean Museum (Pl. 14.19). The carving comes from Mathurā; it depicts the mother goddess Harītī. In drawing a thread between similar plastic expressions of maternity in a stone image and a terracotta "mother-cum-offering-cup", and, in tracing that thread back to those anthropomorphic pots whose existence may have been stimulated by ritual, I embark upon my main thesis.

It is proposed that we look at the Vedic ritual as a three-dimensional, living icon whose properties could provide models upon which to construct devotional icons.³⁵

To demonstrate the potential of this heretofore untapped source, it can be shown that the physical properties of a great public ritual help us to gain an understanding of the iconography of the Pañcamukha Liṅga. We are now quite certain that the liṅga of Śiva, whether plain or encircled by heads, was devoid of priapric symbolism.³⁶ A philological perusal of the term *liṅga* in Vedic and early devotional literature determines that *liṅga* is the first "sign" of the transcendental Śiva. It expresses belief in the immanence of the transcendental in nature. The "sign" is in the form of a phallus to symbolize god's capacity to produce life itself. The significance of the heads has as yet not been fully understood. Here is where the orthopraxy connected with the Vedic Agnicayana ritual is helpful.

The name of this ritual signals its most distinctive feature; Agnicayana means "the piling (of bricks to build for the altar) of fire". The main fire altar is in the shape of a huge bird whose wing span is about forty feet. The altar consists of five layers of baked bricks; in all there are a minimum of a 1,000 bricks, of various shapes and names specified in the texts.³⁷ Were we confined to these texts alone, the visual dimensions of this complex twelve day ritual would be hard to assess. Quite wonderfully, a full visual docu-

³⁵ This line of thinking is also apparent in Malamoud, "Briques", who cites other forms of imagery fostered by the Vedic ritual; see pp. 83–85. Ritual as icon is different from *art* in ritual: on the latter see the classic paper of Clifford Reis Jones, "Dhūlicitra: Historical Perspectives on Art and Ritual" in *Kalādarśana, American Studies in the Art of India*, ed. J.G. Williams, New Delhi, 1981, pp. 69–75.

³⁶ See Stella Kramrisch, *Presence*, pp. 162–178; D.M. Srinivasan, "Significance and Scope of Pre-Kuṣāṇa Śaivite Iconography" in *Discourses on Śiva*, ed. M.W. Meister, Philadelphia, 1984, pp. 32–46.

³⁷ The Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa mentions 10,800 kiln-fired bricks; on this see H.S. Converse "The Agnicayana Rite: Indigenous Origin?", *Hist. of Religion XIV*, 1974, 81ff. But Converse does not consult the Black Yajurveda, which in all recensions mentions a minimum of 1,000 bricks. For details on the excellent analysis by C.K. Kashikar, leading to the rejection of Converse's thesis, see Chapter 6.

mentation of the ritual is available. The Agnicayana was performed in 1975 by Nambudiri Brahmans of Kerala. The Nambudiris have made it a chief interest of their community to preserve and cultivate some of the traditional Vedic knowledge. Their entire performance of the ritual was taped, filmed and photographed by a set of Western scholars.³⁸ The following is based on the documentation of the actual performance together with the descriptions in the ancient texts.³⁹

In each of the five layers comprising the great altar are a group of bricks called "mukha" bricks. There are five "mukha" bricks in each of the five layers of the altar. The bricks are piled into the altar in a specific way. In specifying the manner in which they are laid down in the first layer, the general pattern in all the five layers is known. Bricks numbered 149–153 on the Plan of the First Layer (Pl. 14.20), correspond to the "mukha" bricks. In following the placement of each brick, it is evident that Brick No. 149 is in the easterly direction and occupies a position in the head of the bird. Brick No. 150 is in the southern section and occupies a position in the right wing. Brick No. 151 is in the westerly section and occupies a position in the tail. Brick No. 152 is in the northern section and occupies a position in the left wing. Brick No. 153 occupies a position in the center of the altar. After the five "mukha" bricks are laid down, there follows the placement of four other sets of bricks, each having their own distinctive names. In this way, the "mukha" bricks initiate a series of bricks with the following names:

- "aṅga" or limb brick – of which there are five
- Prajāpatya – one brick for the god Prajāpati, Lord of Creatures
- Rṣabha or bull brick – of which there is one
- Lokampṛṇa or space fillers – of which there are forty

This schema, repeated in all the layers, has some noteworthy features. It is most interesting that the five "mukha" or "head" bricks are immediately followed by five "aṅga" or limb bricks. The "aṅga" bricks are also placed in a directional pattern; actually they are placed in close proximity to the "mukha" bricks. No other set of bricks correlates in this manner. Apparently, the "mukha" and "aṅga" bricks are meant to define a unit. That unit seems to be a "body" having multiple heads and limbs. From this it may be deduced that the term *mukha* need not simply mean "head"; it can connote "head (or the first element) when more of the body is forthcoming". The "mukha" bricks usher in more than the anthropomorphic entity; they also usher in a cognate theriomorphic entity, to judge from the "bull" brick forming part of the series. This theriomorphic entity evokes the realm of Śiva. The bull is, of course, the theriomorphic form of Śiva. The anthropomorphic entity may well be associated with the Vedic forerunner of Śiva, Rudra. As soon as the building of the Agnicayana altar has been completed, a liturgical chant

³⁸ Staal, *Agni* Vols. I & II.

³⁹ The Nambudiri tradition cannot be traced directly to that of the Vedic Aryans and to the beginning of the Vedic tradition (see Staal, *Agni* I, Chap. 6; II, pp. 256–278; 279–299). In spite of this, we can use their recent performance as evidence since the part of the ritual with which we are concerned, namely the building of the main altar is based on descriptions in Vedic texts (cf. Staal, *Agni*, pp. 482ff.). The altar plans referred to below are derived from the textual descriptions.

and oblation are offered to Rudra. This is the Śatarudrīya litany. The offering and chant are made over one distant brick (No. 189 in the northern section), in the fifth layer of the altar. This is the appropriate place to give homage to Rudra for “in that region lies the house of that god”.⁴⁰ The homage extols Rudra as the creator of life and as the rhythm in life. The good and the bad, the big and the small, the ugly and the sublime are all expressions of him. From this long and powerful litany, here are some excerpts:⁴¹

Homage to the turbaned wanderer on the mountains (cf. Pl. 14.4).

Homage to the wearer of the knotted locks and to him of the shaven hair (cf. Pl. 14.4; right).

Homage to the powerful and fearful One (cf. Pl. 14.3).

Homage to the auspicious and the more auspicious One (cf. Pl. 14.3).

The Sanskrit of the last stanza reads: *namaḥ śivāya ca śivatarāya ca*. It is of course Rudra's epithet, *śiva*, “the auspicious One” which becomes the name of the god in Hinduism. But already a connection between the name “Rudra” and the name “Śiva” is made in ancient Hinduism. The connection occurs in a story related in *Kaṭha Āraṇyaka* (II.98–101).⁴²

In sum, physical properties in the Agnicayana reveal many elements suggestive of the iconographic properties found in the Pañcamukha Liṅga of Śiva. First, in both ritual and icon, “mukha” is associated with the number “five”. Second, in both ritual and icon, the five mukhas are placed in the four directions and in the center. Third, in both ritual and icon the center is symbolically associated with procreation; in the Pañcamukha Liṅga icon, that symbol is, of course, the Liṅga itself. It may now be noted that a brick located in the center of the Agnicayana altar (i.e. Brick No. 4 in the First Layer) is called *Retaḥsic*, or “Semen Discharging”, and that, just like a vertically extended Liṅga, one *Retaḥsic* brick is again placed in Layer Three and another in Layer Five above and in the same space as the initial Brick No. 4.⁴³ Fourth, the heads of the icon seem to answer epithets of Rudra contained in the Śatarudrīya litany chanted immediately upon completion of the piling of the altar. Parenthetically, the domain of Śiva is also acknowledged by the presence of the “bull” brick in the series of bricks initiated by the “mukha” bricks. Still, it is a big jump from bricks in an altar to heads on the shaft of a liṅga. But perhaps here too, the ritual was the catalyst for bringing these shapes together. The ritual demands the use of round, wooden goblets for some oblations made for the gods. One of the goblets, the *ṛtu-pātra* is described in another Vedic context as having a head (*mukha*) on both sides.⁴⁴ In 1975, the carpenter, under the direction of a Nambudiri, turned out simple cylindrical goblets with one or two heads on the cylindrical shaft (Pl. 14.21). It should be quickly registered that these recent goblets made under the direction of a Nambudiri (cf. fn. 39) could be considered as dubious evidence in support of our thesis. A goblet with

⁴⁰ Śata. Brāh. 9.1.1.10.

⁴¹ The excerpts are cited from *Taittirīya Saṃhitā* IV.5.3h; 8d; 8l.

⁴² See Michael Witzel, *Das Kaṭha Āraṇyaka*, textkritische Edition. Inaugural-Dissertation, Friedrich-Alexander-Universität Erlangen-Nürnberg, 1974 [?]. I am pleased that Professor Witzel drew my attention to this passage.

⁴³ See *Agni* I, p. 459 and Fig. 37, re: Brick No. 3 in the Third Layer, and, p. 479 and Fig. 39, re: Brick No. 204 in the Fifth Layer, Brick No. 4 in the First Layer can be located in Plate 14.20.

⁴⁴ *Taittirīya Saṃhitā* VI.5.3.1; *ubhayato-mukham ṛtu-pātram bhavati*.

two "mukhas" could well be a vessel with two mouths (or spouts), for this is the other primary meaning for *mukha*; indeed in a recent album of sacrificial utensils, the *Ṛtugraha* ladles are shown having a beak on both sides.⁴⁵ Nonetheless, in the present context, the Nambudiris' goblets are too provocative not to mention.

To establish the origins for an iconography seen on an artistic representation, it is usual to seek antecedents in prior artistic representations. In effect, postulating antecedents in perishable wood or clay for the extant early Hindu stone icons reflects a desire to continue this approach. But the case of the *Pañcamukha* *Linga* indicates a different predicament. Here is a form suddenly appearing with a fullfledged iconographic language for which there is no pre-existing artistic model in sight. The *Bhīṭā* *Pañcamukha* *Linga* is an invention. Where did the form come from? It is here proposed that the visual aspects of a ritual stimulated the invention of the new iconic shape.⁴⁶ For this to happen, there must however be present the religious and/or social possibilities for the transmission of orthopraxy into iconography. Influencing factors must be permitted to move from a performing media to a representational media. In India, during the several centuries around the Christian era possibilities to transpose ritual into icon existed.

This period saw the performance of impressive *śrauta* rites. Three sites at Jagatgram in Dehra Dun District have been identified where a king performed four *Aśvamedha* rituals.⁴⁷ Each site contains an eagle-shaped altar. Inscribed bricks from the first site mention that king *Sīlavarman* celebrated four *Aśvamedhas* at Jagatgram. One inscription from the first site has been dated to the third century A.D. At the outskirts of *Kauśāmbī*, near to the present city of Allahabad, a large altar in the shape of a bird has been found.⁴⁸ It is not clear whether the altar, which may date to the second or first century B.C., was built to perform the Vedic *Puruṣamedha*, as the excavators claim.⁴⁹ In any case, it did function as an altar in some kind of ritual in antiquity. At Itgi in Belgaum District, a vessel identified as the *ukhā*, needed in the *Agnicayana*, was found; the excavator dates the pot to the first century B.C./A.D.⁵⁰ Andhra Pradesh has yielded inscriptions of the second-third centuries A.D., which indicate that rituals such as the *Aśvamedha* were performed by the *Ikṣvāku* kings.⁵¹

This period also did not pose barriers to persons wishing to be involved in both Vedic

⁴⁵ T.N. Dharmadhikari, *Yajñayudhāni*. Vaidika Saṁśodhana Maṇḍala. Pune, 1989, p. 51.

⁴⁶ For a comparable historical situation in another area of world art, see my paper "Ritual as Icon in India", *World Art, Themes of Unity and Diversity*, Acts of the XXVIth International Congress of the History of Art; ed. Irving Lavin, Vol. III. The Pennsylvania State University Press; University Park and London 1989, pp. 561–562. Liturgical drama, of course, enters into dialogue with iconography not only at the incipient stage of a religious image. For example, it has been shown that the gestures and movements of Jan van Eyck's characters in the Annunciation of the National Gallery of Art (Washington), recalls the drama of the Golden Mass celebrated in the local churches of Flanders during the artist's time. See Carol J. Purtle, *The Marian Paintings of Jan van Eyck*, Princeton, 1982, pp. 47–49.

⁴⁷ See R. Thapar, "Archaeological Background to the *Agnicayana*" in Staal, *Agni* II, pp. 34–35.

⁴⁸ G.R. Sharma, *The Excavation at Kauśāmbī* (1957–1959), Allahabad 1960, pp. 87ff.

⁴⁹ For a summary of the controversy surrounding the identification of the altar, see Thapar, "Agnicayana", in Staal, *Agni* II, pp. 26–27.

⁵⁰ C.G. Kashikar, "Pottery in Vedic Literature", *Indian Journal of the History of Science* 4.1–2, 1969, 26, fn. 23.

⁵¹ T.N. Ramachandran, *Nagarjunakonda*, Calcutta 1938, Memoires of the Archaeological Survey of India, No. 71. To date however, there is no conclusive archaeological evidence to support the performance of such rituals.

rituals and devotional cult practices requiring the use of icons. Of course, it should not be forgotten that there should have been, at all times, a segment of the population that was never involved in both Vedic *and* devotional cults. This segment, which was not under the direct influence of the Vedic religion although probably in awe of it, would have no obstacles to clear before adopting to the worship of the divine in a concrete form. But for those involved in both forms of worship, two inscriptions of the pre-Christian era clearly show that it was possible to patronize both Vedic rituals and devotional cults. The Nānāghat inscription, in Maharashtra, begins with an invocation to several gods including the Bhāgavata gods Saṃkarṣaṇa and Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa; the inscription then continues to describe the amounts of sacrificial fees the donor paid to the priests who performed a number of Vedic sacrifices. This inscription dates to the first century B.C.⁵² The Ghosūṇḍī inscription from Rajasthan belongs to the same period; it mentions that the Aśvamedha was performed for the same Bhāgavata gods, Saṃkarṣaṇa and Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa.⁵³ A certain absence of tension between ancient Hinduism and the emerging sectarian Hinduism already alluded to, is again recognizable in these documents. This fluid religious atmosphere, wherein influences and allegiances could flow with a certain ease, should have enabled the transmission and adoption of certain ritual forms into certain sectarian contexts.

All this is not to imply that the Agnicayana directly (or solely) inspired the form of the Pañcamukha Liṅga. Ritual can be depicted in art, but art need not depict the exact nature of the ritual. It is to imply that if inquiry into the antecedents of this Hindu image is made, then such an inquiry must consider the Agnicayana as a possible source. In general, ritual orthopraxy should be considered as a potential source for the origin and significance of aspects in early Hindu iconography. In particular, ritual orthopraxy has much to recommend it as a potential source for the shapes of some images with multiple bodily parts for it can also transmit a meaning for a multiple bodily part.⁵⁴ The same Agnicayana which acts out the meaning of “mukha” also acts out the meaning of “virūpa” or “viśvarūpa” (i.e. omniform) for the audience at hand. A “virūpa” god, according to the ritual, is one who contains all living forms in his middle, or his “womb”; that meaning is completely in accordance with its meaning in the entire Vedic tradition.⁵⁵ Ritual in ancient India may have been the experiential connection between ideas we now consign to texts and iconography we now confirm in imagery.

Ritual is the enactment of a religious reality needing to be repeatedly experienced. It imparts notions about this reality through words, gestures, postures, colours, objects and their arrangements. Given the possibility for an historical rapprochement between the performing media and the representational media, any one of the ritual elements can function as a pictorial model making available an iconographic language upon which an incipient art can draw.

⁵² D.C. Sircar, *Select Inscriptions I*, Calcutta 1965, pp. 192–197.

⁵³ Sircar, *Select Inscriptions I*, pp. 90–91.

⁵⁴ However, I am not quite convinced that ritual orthopraxy is a major influencing factor in the production of the early four-armed images of Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa.

⁵⁵ See, for example, Chapter 6 for textual analyses of the Agnicayana which discuss the symbolic meaning of *virūpa* and *viśvarūpa*.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

MAHĀ YAKṢA: IMAGE OF AN APPARITION

The cosmic forms constitute the *vairūpya*, the manifold appearance of the deity. Each of them in its strict definition is an apparition, a *yaksha* merely name and form without real substance.

V.S. Agrawala "Viśvakarmā"

A

There is something of a Yakṣa in the two earliest *vaiṣṇava* sculptures showing cosmic forms of the deity. The first, a four-sided upright portraying the *vaiṣṇava caturvyūha* notion depicts two of the emanations, or, *vyūhas* in anthropomorphic forms (Pls. 15.1 & 2). They are tall, pot-bellied males and on that account they recall the earliest Mahā Yakṣas (i.e. the colossal yakṣa forms). These affinities influenced their initial identification. N.P. Joshi identified the upright from Bhīṭā as a fourfold Yakṣa image of c. the second century B.C.¹ The four-armed *vaiṣṇava* image from Malhar, Madhya Pradesh (Pl. 14.1), reminds of a Yakṣa for a different reason. It calls attention to a connection between "Vīra" and "Yakṣa". With his sword suspended from the left hip all the way down nearly to the ankles (Pl. 15.3), he conveys "maleness", especially "an heroic male" (*vīra*). The Malhar image is big (c. 5' 2") and is readily comparable with a Śuṅga over-life size torso having a similar sword also on the left hip (Pl. 16.10 & 11). This torso, which would have been originally part of a large male figure, comes from the village of Bīrāvai (Skt. *vīra*); its name indicates that at one time that locality in Rajasthan paid honor to a hero-god. Four miles from the Bīrāvai image, in Noh, Rajasthan, a statue still under worship as "Jakkha" (Skt. Yakṣa) Bābā was discovered.² Again, it is a massive Śuṅga Yakṣa found on the bank of a tank (Pl. 15.4). On the basis of girth alone, which at the shoulders (inclusive of both arms) is seven feet across, the Noh Yakṣa stands as a large (or *mahā*) Yakṣa. "Mahā" could well be applied also to the Bīrāvai and Malhar statues, but perhaps in their cases, *mahā Vīra* would be more suitable. Actually, the name Mahā Vīra was given to the foremost of Yakṣas.³ Possibly both the Bīrāvai torso and the Malhar figure represent a Vīra, a great or foremost Yakṣa, the latter figure incorporating these qualities within some sort of *vaiṣṇava* context. The special connection believed to exist in ancient times between Vīras and Yakṣas is evident still in modern times. V.S. Agrawala observed

¹ N.P. Joshi, "Some Unnoticed Finds of Iconographic Interest", *East and West* (Rome), Vol. 22, Nos. 1-2, 1972, 41-43.

² R.C. Agrawala, "Yakṣa Torso from Bharatpur Region", *Journal of the Oriental Institute*, Vol. 17, 1967, 64-65.

³ Cf. V.S. Agrawala, *Ancient Indian Folk Cults*, Varanasi, 1970, p. 186.

that on his campus at Banaras Hindu University there are "to-day four Yaksha shrines under the name of 'Bīr' [i.e. Vīr] receiving religious homage even now".⁴ His many other firsthand accounts leave little doubt as to the prevalence of Yakṣa worship in modern times under the name of Bīra and Barahm (i.e. Brahmā) worship.⁵ Names of some of the Bīr-Barahm godlings show that epithets indicative of "junior" and "senior" are prefixed to Yakṣa names, and it should have been the same in ancient times. In fact, V.S. Agrawala surmises that when the Jain Savior, Vardhamāna, became famous, he received the honorific "Mahāvīra" (i.e. senior Vīra, that is, foremost Yakṣa).⁶ It seems equally possible that the four-armed Malhār figure commemorates a famous or senior Vīra. Combining *vaiṣṇava* attributes with Vīra and Yakṣa features, the Malhar figure could be a *vaiṣṇava* Mahā Vīra.

The Noh Yakṣa, along with several other early Yakṣas, assumes a particular shape which tells a lot about the nature of Yakṣas, a matter of prime importance if we are ultimately to understand what their features may mean when incorporated into the earliest *vaiṣṇava* multiplicity imagery. The overall impression of the Noh Yakṣa is one of massiveness. This impression is achieved by height (the visible height is c. 5') and an unrelenting series of expansive forms. The entire Yakṣa is composed of rounded volumes. The head is large and round. Viewed from the back, the neck is as broad as the head (Pl. 15.5). The shoulders and the remaining parts of the arms and legs appear like inflated tubes. Foremost of all the swollen forms is the Yakṣa's middle, further accentuated by two pieces of cloth. One is a looped sash which circles the upper part of the Yakṣa's belly; the other is a sash holding up the dhoti and emphasizing the lowermost part of the convex hulk. There is no need to indicate all the details of this oft described Yakṣa. Suffice it to note that all such details are subordinated to the sheer volume of the image. The Noh Yakṣa is of course very similar to an even more well-known image, the Parkham Yakṣa which has been attributed to c. the first century B.C. (Pl. 15.6).⁷ This is a figure over 8' in height coming from the village of Parkham, which is situated near to Mathurā, as is also Noh. When found, the figure received worship under the name "Jakhaiya" (ultimately derived from Skt. "yakṣa").⁸ The word "yakṣa" is not mentioned in the inscription around the feet of the image. The inscription does state that the image of the Holy One was caused to be made by the members of the Māṇibhada (i.e. Māṇibhadra) congregation. On that account, it is surmised that the image represents Yakṣa Māṇibhadra, whose connection with "vīra" worship (in present Bengal) may have begun in antiquity.⁹ Two other Yakṣas are associated with Māṇibhadra; one is from the region of Kauśāmbī and one is from Pawaya (ancient Padmāvati). These figures confirm the impression con-

⁴ *Folk Cults*, p. 185.

⁵ See V.S. Agrawala, *Folk Cults*, pp. 185-191; Cf. M. Chandra, "Some Aspects of Yakṣa Cult in Ancient India", *Prince of Wales Museum Bulletin*, No. 3, 1954, 61-62.

⁶ *Folk Cults*, pp. 186; 188.

⁷ See Gritli v. Mitterwallner, "Yakṣas of Ancient Mathurā" in *Mathurā: The Cultural Heritage*, gen. ed. D.M. Srinivasan, New Delhi, 1989, pp. 368ff. D.C. Sircar, *Select Inscriptions I*, p. 93.

⁸ See V.S. Agrawala, *Folk Cults*, p. 167.

⁹ See V.S. Agrawala's findings presented in R.N. Misra, *Yaksha Cult and Iconography*, New Delhi 1981, p. 85.

veyed by the partial figure of the Noh Yakṣa, namely that a huge body and swelling forms, in particular an expanded middle, are the primary traits of early free-standing Yakṣas. The entire torso of the Parkham Yakṣa expands as a unit. The surface is taut. Volumes defining the neck, shoulders and chest swell and lock into each other abruptly. The neck is so wide that it articulates more as a passageway than a part of a body. The face whose features are now defaced, does not seem to have had a fierce expression. The belly is again set off by a looped sash on top and a tight sash on the bottom. Conspicuous, it dominates the body's contours. It is easy to see why a Yakṣa with this feature should be labeled a *kumbhodara yakṣa* (i.e. a yakṣa whose belly is like a water pot). Four miles from Parkham comes a fragment of a male, worshipped under the name of "Jakheya", who surpasses in size the Parkham Yakṣa. This is the upper part of the Yakṣa from Baroda in Mathurā District.¹⁰ When complete the image should have reached over twelve feet in height. It shows the same fullness of forms as the Parkham and Noh Yakṣas; it has the unusually broad neck, inflated chest and shoulders and the looped sash marking the upper part of the large abdomen. Mention of these few early free-standing Yakṣas will suffice since the aim is neither to reiterate surveys of the various types (which would need to include the demonic forms, the caryatids, seated as well as standing types, plus the female counterparts), nor to present an historical sequence (which would need to concentrate on stylistic considerations, in the main).¹¹ Inquiry into Mahā Yakṣa's essential features and what they disclose about the nature of this Yakṣa is the aim here. The size of the figures and the absence of the flywhisk indicate that these large Yakṣas are not attendant figures, but major cult images. Indeed on the Yakṣa from Deoriyā (about one km. from Bhīṭā) attributes are present which bespeak of high status.¹² The Deoriyā colossus is adorned with a turban and a large protective umbrella, both insignia of the highest cultic status. All these colossi (plus the Palwal Yakṣa, the two Patna Yakṣas, the Haigunda Yakṣa,¹³ the Vidiśā, Pratapgarh and Sopara Yakṣas, to mention the other important free-standing colossi) express an astounding sense of physical energy, in spite of the archaic stiffness of the limbs and their abrupt articulation. A sense of energy is due to the palpable fullness that informs every bodily cavity, especially the belly. An essential feature of these early free-standing Yakṣas is the locked-in sense of fullness, a characteristic which continues even in later ages. An excellent example of a Kumbhodara Yakṣa dating to the sixth/seventh century A.D. comes from North India, probably Bihar (Pl. 15.7).¹⁴ The rotund, seated Yakṣa holds a knotted mace (*gadā*), in both his hands which are placed on his knees. He spreads his legs far apart to make room for a belly of truly globular proportions. Its girth is circled by a thick sash whose ends are tied into a bow. Below the

¹⁰ V.S. Agrawala, "Pre-Kushāṇa Art of Mathurā", *J.U.P.H.S.* Vol. 6, 1933, see 95 and Fig. 9.

¹¹ For recent works providing a bibliography on these matters, see N.P. Joshi, "Unnoticed Finds", 42, esp. fn. 2; v. Mitterwallner, "Yakṣas".

¹² A.K. Coomaraswamy, "The Origin of the Buddha Image", *Art Bulletin*, Vol. 9, 1927; Fig. 47.

¹³ It is reproduced in *Indian Archaeology 1973-74 - A Review*, Plate XXXII; the other yakṣas are frequently published, see for example the publication mentioned in fn. 10.

¹⁴ R.C. Agrawala, "More Sculptures from the National Museum, New Delhi", *East and West* (Rome), N.S. Vol. 20, No. 3, 1970, 351ff.

navel it is possible to catch a glimpse of the lower sash straining to get around the bottom of the belly.

Depictions of painted Kumbhodara Yakṣas and the "male" vessels already described reveal that the belly is not merely inspired by the shape of a vessel. It is meant to represent a vessel (*kumbha*, *ghaṭa* etc.), or vice versa. In the aforementioned "male" vessels from Sonkh (Pl. 14.9), Bhīṭā (Pl. 14.10), Taxila (Pl. 14.11), Purana Qila (Pl. 14.12) and Mathurā (Pls. 14.13 & 14), the vessel equates with the body which is effectively reduced to the belly. Two painted Kumbhodara Yakṣas also have bodies which assume the features of vessels. The Yakṣas have been found painted on rocks in the region of central India. They are contemporaneous with the "male" anthropomorphic pots and the majority of the stone colossi just reviewed. The first Kumbhodara Yakṣa comes from the Bhonrawali hill (Cave II A-5) in the Bhimbetka region (Raisen Dist., Madhya Pradesh).¹⁵ Dr. Mathpal, who has studied Bhimbetka rock paintings in detail, assigns the figure to the Early Historic Period and states in his communication that it is some 2200 years before the present. That means that a Mauryan dating has been given to the figure whose head is formed by a rectangle outlined with a double line (see Pl. 15.8 which represents a drawing of the figure in the Cave). The head rests directly on the mouth of the vessel, whose rim turns outward. The vessel is the body of the Yakṣa. At its widest part, a ribbon cuts across, reminding of the sash that circles the upper part of the belly on the sculptured and larger counterparts. In the painted versions, the ribbon extends beyond the body in a manner indicative of outstretched arms. Two dissimilar staffs are held in each of the hands. The Yakṣa's legs are splayed open and are rendered in a series of short, unconnected brush strokes. The Bhimbetka Yakṣa, has a benign expression on his face, and is in a field with auspicious symbols such as a bird, the svastika, the railing, the moon or mountain symbol and a hollow cross. It therefore is likely that this Yakṣa too is an auspicious representation. Nearly identical to this Yakṣa is another Kumbhodara Yakṣa from Binaikā near Bharkhera (M.P.). K.D. Bajpai places the figure, painted in red ochre, between the second century B.C. and the second century A.D. (Pl. 15.9; sketch is on Pl. 15.10).¹⁶ This Yakṣa (ht. 6"), has both a fiercer expression and hair which grows upward like two pliant stalks. Again the head rests on the mouth of the open vessel; it is almost as if the vessel is brimming with vegetation which is converted into hair. Here too the girth of the Yakṣa's body is punctuated with a ribbon. These paintings which show the body/vessel marked with the ribbon are just a step away, visually, from the cloth, draped and knotted, over the *pūrṇa ghaṭa* ("filled container") as depicted in early Indian art (Pl. 15.11). Such decorated vessels probably reflect the appearance of ritual vessels in certain worshipful contexts. Al-George and Roşu connect

¹⁵ Personal communication from Dr. Yashodhar Mathpal, dated April 4, 1989. Dating of this "Yakṣa" figure is on the basis of superimpositions of painted layers at Bhimbetka and the scientific analyses of the components of each layer; personal communication from Dr. Mathpal dated June 6, 1989. I am thankful to Dr. Mathpal for his explanations of the work at Bhimbetka. See also Robert R.R. Brooks and Vishnu S. Wakankar, *Stone Age Painting in India*, New Haven and London, 1976, p. 57 and p. 98.

¹⁶ Information in a personal communication, dated July 16, 1979. Prof. Bajpai kindly supplied me with this photograph and sketch.

such images of the draped *pūrṇa ghaṭa* to rituals wherein the vessels “en tant que support du divin ou des reliques du mort” are addressed.¹⁷ They also point out that the vessel’s sash is imbued with precise symbolism pertaining to both the cosmic and the theological levels. For example, the vessel in the Agnicayana, the *ukhā*, is presented with a girdle (*rāsnā*) that represents, according to the Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa passage accompanying the gesture, the celestial regions (ŚB VI.5.2.11), as well as the girdle of Aditi (ŚB VI.5.2.13). Since Aditi is the embodiment of motherhood and generation in the Saṃhitās,¹⁸ the girdle which highlights her loins must be equally charged with procreative energy or generative powers. The *ukhā* itself also corresponds to cosmic, celestial and ritualistic entities. The three parts of the *ukhā* (plus the whole),¹⁹ in ŚB VI.5.2.3–6, correspond to four different sets of gods, parts of the universe and Vedic meters. The *ukhā* in the Āpastamba Śrautasūtra (c. 500 B.C.), receives not only a girdle, which seems to be an elevated strip of clay, fashioned during its preparation, it also should have two, four, six or eight breasts/udders (i.e. elevations; *stana-* XVI.5.2).²⁰ The Baudhāyana Śrautasūtra (X.5; Taittirīya Recension) also specifies that an upper girdle and breasts/udders (*stana-*) should be carved on the *ukhā* to be used in the Agnicayana.²¹ In the Pravargya rite, the Mahāvīra pot is also fitted with an upper girdle (*rāsnā*) during the course of its preparation,²² and it is given “elevations” (*uddhi-*).²³ It is clear that the *Ukhā* and the Mahāvīra vessels are outfitted, mainly during the preparational stages, with a girdle and female decorations having cosmic and procreative import.²⁴ In addition, a conceptual connection may have been eventually forged between “the vessel” and “the place of birth”. A word such as *yoni* develops the specialized secondary meaning of “womb-chamber”, from the primary meaning “place of issue, receptacle, abode or place” (especially on or before the ritual altar).²⁵ Several Upaniṣads’ usage of *yoni* reflects the secondary meaning; *yoni* as “source” in the Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad (1.9), implies “a pregnant cavity”; in the Bṛhadāraṇyaka (1.4.11) and Mahānārāyaṇa (vs. 535) Upaniṣads, *yoni* stipulates the Brahman-Womb, birth-place of creation. The result is that a symbolic connection between “vessel” and “place of birth” can be made for the time of the sūtras. The possibility is strong that ritual vessels mentioned in the sūtras were understood as life-symbols, having possible cosmic

¹⁷ S. Al-George et A. Roşu, “Pūrṇa Ghaṭa et Le Symbolisme du Vase dans L’Inde”, *Arts Asiatiques*, Tome IV, 1957, 243ff.; 251.

¹⁸ In the Rīg Veda, Aditi is allied with Vāk, Sacred Speech, another female creative principle. Aditi/Vāk is incorporated into cosmogonic speculations which posit her as a creative principle. See especially RV 10.72.3ff. where she is called Uttānapad (She whose legs are spread [in parturition]).

¹⁹ On the addition of “1” signifying “the whole” to the sum of the parts, see Chapter 6, pp. 71–72.

²⁰ C.G. Kashikar, “Pottery in the Vedic Literature”, *Indian Journal of the History of Science*, Vol. 4, 1969, 21.

²¹ Kashikar, “Pottery”, 19–20.

²² Kashikar, “Pottery”, 16–17, using the Baudhāyana Śrautasūtra (IX 1–4).

²³ J.A.B. van Buitenen, *The Pravargya*, Poona, 1968, p. 10.

²⁴ It should be noted that except for details on the preparation of these two vessels, we have very little additional information in the Vedic texts on the preparation of Vedic pottery; Kashikar, “Pottery”, 24.

²⁵ See L. Renou, “L’acception première du mot sanskrit yōni”, *BSL* 41:1, 1940, pp. 18, 20. The idea that a receptacle is a womb-chamber promotes the Mahābhārata birth-story of Ṛṣi Agastya who is born inside a pot. This causes him to be called Kumbhajanman, Kumbhayoni, Kumbhasambhava, Ghaṭodbhava etc.; see *The Mahābhārata* transl. and ed. by J.A.B. van Buitenen, Books 2 and 3, Chicago, p. 187. In the Kauṣītaki Brāhmaṇa (VI.1–9), Rudra is born from a golden bowl.

implications. (The Mahāvīra, for example, represents the sun in the ritual whose intention is to reinforce the power of the sun.)²⁶ The symbolism attributed to the ritual vessels should be likewise attributed to the *pūrṇa ghaṭa*, which is always encircled by a girdle in the art.²⁷ By extension, the correspondence between a filled vessel and a filled womb is retained when the hypostatic *pūrṇa ghaṭa* is fitted unto the body of the Yakṣa as his swollen belly. Like the craftsmen when they fashioned a Yakṣa's swollen belly, the ancient ritualists did not shy away from ascribing female procreative attributes to the male. The Mahāvīra vessel makes this point implicit. Here is a vessel called "the large man" or "the great hero", therefore obviously a "male" vessel, which is adorned with "elevations" and "a girdle", symbols of fecundity taken from the female realm. The Pravargya is an iconic ritual and it may have, on that account, helped prepare for the acceptance of an iconography which associates the male's pot-belly with the female's pregnant womb.

There are numerous examples which demonstrate that the belly of a god, godling or goddess, is ideologically connected to the *pūrṇa ghaṭa* and represents the filled womb-chamber. Depicted on railing pillars and on temple doors are small Yakṣas from whose bellies forms of life proceed. A lower fragment of a Bharhut railpost now in the Allahabad Museum depicts a small, seated Yakṣa on either side. On one side vegetal forms, including a lotus still intact, stream from his distended navel (Pl. 15.12). On the other side similar forms stream from his mouth (Pl. 15.13). Be it navel or mouth, plant life can arise from the Yakṣa because his body, mainly composed of his belly (= vessel = womb) is fecund. For the same reason, squatting, full-bellied Yakṣas on either side of a railing pillar from Sāñchī Stūpa II unfurl from their navels flowers, buds and leaves over the upper portion of a pillar.²⁸ A seven hundred year interim has neither affected the basic iconography nor auspiciousness of the plant-bearing Yakṣa found, in a later example, on a doorframe from the temple at Bhumara (M.P.) of the fifth century A.D. (Pl. 15.14). With all these examples, as with the painted Kumbhodara Yakṣas, the limbs are not as important as the middle of the body which emphasizes the fruitful womb. A Yakṣa on the lowest architrave of the south torana of Sāñchī Stūpa I exhibits a splendid variation (Pl. 15.15; sketch from A.K. Coomaraswamy, *Yakṣas*, on Pl. 15.16). Walking on infantile legs, the bloated belly of the Yakṣa sprouts plant forms both from the navel and the mouth. Two Bharhut railing medallions, while also recognizing the symbolic interchangeability of these two orifices, confirm that in all these cases the image is that of the parturient Yakṣa. In the first medallion the foliage issues from the navel (Pl. 15.17); in the second it comes from the mouth (Pl. 15.18). In both medallions the Yakṣa's body is clothed and poised in a similar, and telling, manner. Nude but for a covering over the genitals, the Yakṣa sits on the bottom of the medallion; his thighs and knees are stretched wide open and his feet are tensed on the lower rim of the medallion. The posture is the same as that of the Birth-Giving Goddess (Pl. 15.19), confirming that these are birth-

²⁶ van Buitenen, *The Pravargya*, p. 31.

²⁷ A.K. Coomaraswamy, *Yakṣas*, Part II, Reprint, New Delhi, 1971, pp. 61-64.

²⁸ A.K. Coomaraswamy, *Yakṣas*, Part II, Reprint, New Delhi, 1971, Pl. 14, No. 1.

giving Yakṣas who bring forth vegetation. The earliest images of the Birth-Giving Goddess are minimally anthropomorphic, there being no head, no arms and no breasts.²⁹ The emphasis is always on a recumbent female having tensely splayed legs and a middle in the shape of a pot.³⁰ What is more, the pot is provided with a girdle that is not unlike the decorated band adorning the *pūrṇa ghaṭa* seen in contemporary art (cf. the Amarāvati relief of a Pūrṇaḡhaṭa, Pl. XVIII, in Barrett³¹ and the recumbent figure from Kondapur, No. 8 in C. Bolon, *Lajja Gauri*). This is not an isolated case; there are many examples of a cloth around the "shoulders" of the *pūrṇa ghaṭa* and around the girth of the body of the pot-like Mother Goddess.³²

A curious set of sexual reversals must be quickly registered. The Birth-Giving Goddess, being without a swollen middle, shows no indication of pregnancy. She appears to be a metaphor for creativity. The counterpart to the Yakṣa, namely the Yakṣī, is almost never portrayed as pregnant in the early art.³³ The Yakṣa is. Be he represented as a colossus or a small ancillary godling, the male form expresses fullness; especially his belly symbolizes the fruitful womb. There can be little doubt that the male Yakṣa represents, on the most general level, a being filled with an animating energy. That energy can be thought of as a creative force and result in the depictions of the plant-sprouting Yakṣas. That energy can be visualized as strength of body and mind and result in depictions of Vīras. In each case, the wellspring, conceptually and plastically, is the Large Yakṣa, the colossus whose entire body, but especially the middle, seems to be filled with animating energy. Here is a case where the Male is the Plenum and the Female is not. Why? Is it because these Yakṣas are still under the influence of antiquity's important and impressive Male Projenitor, Puruṣa-Prajāpati?

B

In singling out the influence of Puruṣa-Prajāpati³⁴ during a considerable part of the first millenium B.C., I am abandoning an approach that establishes importance by counting the number of hymns to a god, or, the frequency of textual references to a god's worship, or yet, another method that looks backward from the position of Hinduism to make

²⁹ Carol Radcliffe Bolon, *Forms of the Goddess Lajja Gauri in Indian Art*, University Park, 1992, p. 13.

³⁰ See Figs. 1-17 in Bolon, *Lajja Gauri*.

³¹ Douglas Barrett, *Sculptures from Amaravati in the British Museum*, London, 1954.

³² Bolon, *Lajja Gauri*, p. 54.

³³ It is of course impossible to provide a comprehensive list of every Yakṣī in early Indian art. A good sampling of the genre is seen in Coomaraswamy, *Yakṣas* and Misra, *Yaksha Cult*. Be they beauteous maidens, seductive females, divine Mothers, or representations of Abundance, the Yakṣīs are either potentially mothers or realized mothers. But they are not shown as being pregnant. At the ACSAA '94 Symposium where I presented the paper "The Pregnant Male", Sara L. Schastok and Stephan Hyler spoke of isolated examples of "pregnant females", but did not mentioned dates. Amy Poster knew of a Mauryan terracotta pregnant female. I have not yet seen their examples.

³⁴ On the homologizing between Puruṣa and Prajāpati which is assumed and sustained throughout the brāhmaṇa tradition, see Chapter 6; pp. 61-62.

selective choices.³⁵ Considering rituals as conveyors of major cultural influences in antiquity, I look to them for impressive creator gods experientially encountered. The ritual which concentrates most on the theme of creation is the spectacular Agnicayana.³⁶ It is a ritual to Agni (an aspect of whom is identified with Rudra) in which creation of the cosmos is attributed to Puruṣa-Prajāpati.³⁷ The piling up (of bricks to build the altar) of fire (i.e. *agni*), whence, of course, the ritual derives its name, is performed, on one level to reconstruct the body of Prajāpati. His body had been dismembered due to his consuming act of cosmic creation. The linkage between building the altar and reconstructing the body is the symbiotic relationship believed to exist between them; specifically, the Agnicayana altar is equated with the body of Prajāpati. One aim in the piling-up of the fire-altar is to resubstantiate the body of the creator and revitalize his womb so that he becomes multiform again.³⁸ Thereby conditions are set so that a new cycle for the (re-)creation of the cosmos may begin. The Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa, a major source for descriptions of the Agnicayana and its symbolic significance, is clear that the universe was created when Prajāpati emptied the contents of his womb. Prajāpati, who can be attributed a maternal anatomy, is a male structurally fit to undergo pregnancy, labor and birth.³⁹ His labor is mythopoeically expressed as the relaxation or emptying of his middle, which is specified as his *yoni*, or womb. Then he experiences a great exhaustion, as a courser who "having run the whole race, fell apart". He needs to be reconstructed, and, as each layer of the fire-altar coordinates with a different part of his body, this is achieved with the completion of the building of the altar. The second layer represents the part between the waist (lit. "middle"), and above the feet; herein is included the womb-chamber. When in the ritual certain bricks, called the Vaiśvadevi bricks, are laid down into the second layer they render the womb of Prajāpati fertile again. For, the living beings that went out from Prajāpati at the time of creation are symbolized by these bricks and in the act of putting them down in the second layer, the living beings, are reinstated into the womb-chamber of Prajāpati. The piling of the second layer (as well as the third), renders Prajāpati full of forms again. A locked-in fullness, evocative of the sculptural rendering of the Yakṣa's middle, has been achieved. In that elsewhere in the Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa, Prajāpati is considered to be a vessel (the Dronakalaśa),⁴⁰ and, the quintessential nature of the filled

³⁵ Prajāpati has, of course, received keen attention whenever creation theories and cosmogonic speculations in the Brāhmaṇas are under review. Only recently has attention focused solely on him. See J.R. Joshi, "Prajāpati in Vedic Mythology and Ritual", *Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, Annals*, Vol. 53, 1972, 101–125; Jan Gonda, "The Popular Prajāpati", *History of Religions*, Vol. 22, 1982, 129–149; Jan Gonda, *Prajāpati and the Year*, Amsterdam, 1984; Jan Gonda, *Prajāpati's Rise to a Higher Rank*, Leiden, 1986; and J. Gonda, "Prajāpati's Numbers", in *Orientalia Iosephi Tucci Memoriae Dicata*, ed. G. Gnoli et L. Lanciotti, Vol. II, Rome, pp. 539–560. Footnote 60, in Gonda's "Popular Prajāpati" mentions a Japanese study of 1967–68 on Prajāpati in the Brāhmaṇas.

³⁶ L. Renou, *Vedic India* (Classical India, Vol. Three), trans. by Philip Spratt, Varanasi, 1971; Paragraphs 169 & 217.

³⁷ See Chapter 5, p. 51, Chapter 14; Chapter 4 comments on the linkages between Rudra and Agni, and, Agni and Puruṣa-Prajāpati.

³⁸ See Chapter 6, pp. 65–68 for much of what follows.

³⁹ See Chapter 6.

⁴⁰ ŚB 4.3.1.6.

vase is the state of *viśvarūpa*,⁴¹ there are numerous, suggestive overlappings between the filled womb of Prajāpati and that of the large Yakṣas. The reason for this may be two-fold. First, it may again be a question of the visual dynamics of the ritual and its ability, on that account, to influence an incipient iconography. Whereas the Pravargya's pot implies that a male can be tempered with female procreative attributes, the Agnicayana's main altar vividly dramatizes this point. In piling up the altar, a vigorous positivism is communicated. It affirms that the creator Prajāpati is a Motherly Male and that his structure can be duplicated in a sanctified place. In an age devoid of adequate models on which to base the structure of gods, that message, encoded into the building of the altar, should not have been lost. Second, there appears to be a direct theological connection between Yakṣa and Prajāpati which succeeds in correlating the structure of one with the other.

The Gopatha Brāhmaṇa, which contains perhaps the lengthiest cosmographic description of any Brāhmaṇa, advances the notion that Prajāpati is an emanation from Brahman-Yakṣa, whose likeness he retains.⁴² The Brāhmaṇa opens with, "Om", verily, the Brahman (neut.) was this in the beginning, just alone, only self-existent. It willed: "I am the Large Yakṣa (*mahadvai yakṣam*). Come, let me measure out from myself a second god of like measure with myself (*hantāham madeva manmātram dvitīyam devam nirmama iti*). It . . . fully heated [itself] . . . perspiration arose on the forehead . . . Pleased thereby, It said, "I, the Large Yakṣa (*mahadvai yakṣam*), know well all that should be known". Subsequently, evolves succeed one another, until the second god, Atharvan-Prajāpati comes about. In all respects, he is in the likeness of Brahman[-Yakṣa] and he is instructed to emit and to care for the creatures. Another cosmogonic schema, this time in the Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa (11.2.3.1-5), but not in an Agnicayana context, gives additional insight into the nature of "Yakṣa" in the Brāhmaṇas. The passage states that Brahman (neut.) descends into these worlds by means of two great mysterious powers⁴³ . . . two Large Yakṣas (*mahatī abhve . . . mahatī yakṣe*), who are called Name and Form (i.e. *nāmā-rūpa*).⁴⁴ Nāma-Rūpa refers to individuality prior to the appearance of individuals in phenomenality. Coomaraswamy, understands Name and Form in this passage as "the means of intellectual and sensitive

⁴¹ AV 10.8.9 (*camasa . . . yasmin yaśo . . . viśvarūpam*). Coomaraswamy says it well, "The *pūrṇa kalāśa* is plainly thought of as an inexhaustible vessel, but the actual form, always associated with vegetation should, I think, be clearly distinguished from that of the plain jars sometimes carried by the early undifferentiated river goddesses, and also from that of the *amṛta* phial borne by Indra and some other deities, though these simpler vessels likewise are of necessity thought of as inexhaustible. . . . The *pūrṇa kalāśa* . . . is invariably encircled by a ribbon or band, tied with knots . . . Thus the form is . . . that of a flower vase, combining a never-failing source of water with an ever-living vegetation . . . *Yakṣas*, Part II, p. 62.

⁴² Gopatha Brāhmaṇa, Eng. trans. with notes and Introduction. Thesis, by H.C. Patyal, Center for Advanced Study in Sanskrit, Univ. of Poona, 1969. Patyal notes that two of the mss. he worked with read *tad ekam eva 'smi* whereas one read . . . *vad* . . . Therefore the first reading is preferred. I wish to thank Mr. Louis Jacob and Mr. Jean Smith both of the Library of Congress for procuring this thesis to assist this research.

⁴³ I follow A.K. Coomaraswamy ("The Yakṣa of the Vedas and Upaniṣads", *The Quarterly Journal of the Mythic Society*, Vol. 28, 1938, 239, fn. 19) who considers *abhve* and *yakṣe* taken together to have this meaning and for *abhva* to properly signify "not-being", which I understand as contrary to phenomenality in this context.

⁴⁴ In Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad 1.1.9, the lower Brahman is identified with food, name and form; see Chapter 8, p. 93.

cognition by which the Brahman descends into these worlds".⁴⁵ The Gopatha Brāhmaṇa which states that Yakṣa gives rise to Prajāpati who is created in Its likeness, provides however few details concerning that likeness. It reveals more about the nature of Yakṣa. The Large Yakṣa is the first creation of Brahman. Yakṣa, coming into being after Brahman experiences will, ought to be the concretization of that first act of will, namely Primordial Will, which is related to the cognitive Mind, according to the Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa passage.

The Kena Upaniṣad (3.14–25; 4.26–28), has more details on the appearance of Primordial Will because it contains the epiphany of the Large Yakṣa. The section opens with the declaration that Brahman gained a victory for the gods (*deva*). The gods became elated (implying "overconfident") in the victory of Brahman because they thought "This victory is really ours. This greatness is really ours". (3.14). It (that is, Brahman, neut.) understood this thought of theirs. Then It appeared before them. They did not understand It (*tat* neut.). "What is this Yakṣa (*idaṁ yakṣam* neut.)?", they asked, (3.15). The gods' inability to correctly understand the reason for their victory causes Brahman to will into existence that which can teach the gods the reason for their success. Brahman appears before them as Yakṣa. But even though the Yakṣa is before them, the gods cannot recognize or understand (*viñña*) It. This situation would be rather puzzling were it not that a fundamental opposition exists between Yakṣa and Devas. Grammar underscores this opposition. *Deva-* is a masculine noun; *yakṣa-* is neuter. That is, the Yakṣa is an entity coming before the creation of phenomenal distinctions, and the Devas come after the creation. Khaṇḍa Three continues and emphasizes the antithesis between the Yakṣa and the Devas by way of deceptively simple vignettes. The Devas first ask Agni (Fire) "Find out what this Yakṣa is". He ran up to It and identified himself. Then the Yakṣa asked, "What power (*vīryam*) is there in you?". "Indeed, all this whatever is on earth, I may burn". The Yakṣa placed before Agni a straw and ordered "Burn this". Agni was powerless to do so (See 3.16–19). The same thing happens when the Devas ask Vāyu (Wind), to find out about the Yakṣa. Having approached the Yakṣa, identified himself and having answered that his *vīrya-* is that he can take anything off the earth, Vāyu is asked to carry (i.e. blow) a straw off the ground. He cannot. (See 3.20–23). When Indra goes on the same mission for the gods, the Yakṣa disappears. (See 3.24). What has happened? Agni and Vāyu are powerless in two basic respects. They can neither find out about the nature of the Yakṣa, nor can they exercise their power before It. Powerless, too, is Indra whose *vīrya-* is related to virility. The implication is that there is some higher power or energy than that possessed by Agni, Vāyu or the Devas, in general. In this Upaniṣad, as in the Gopatha Brāhmaṇa, Yakṣa seems to be the concrete expression of the Purposeful Will of Brahman. Without first the presence of the Will of Brahman, determination to accomplish a particular task (to win a victory, to burn or to blow) is not possible. The gods do not seem to realize this. Then an unusual resolution occurs. In that very spot which the Yakṣa had occupied, Indra came upon Umā, of the Snowy Mountain. She alone can identify the Yakṣa. "It is Brahman", she said. "In that victory of Brahman you

⁴⁵ Coomaraswamy, "Yakṣa of the Vedas", 239, fn. 19.

have become great". What gives Umā the capability to perceive the true nature of Yakṣa and the reason for the gods' victory? The later *Harivaṃśa* implies a commonality between the Goddess and the Yakṣa which may possibly be at work already here.⁴⁶ And what is the lesson to be learned from these allegories? "On the subject of the divine agent, the teaching is: That which flashes forth in lightning and makes one blink is It. Now, concerning the individual self: That which both activates the mind and by which it repeatedly remembers, that Resolute Will (*saṃkalpa*) is It". (See 4.29–30). The "upaniṣad" or secret teaching is that Yakṣa as divinity, experienced outside of oneself, is a flash of light we may say "an apparition".⁴⁷ Experienced internally, or on the psychological plane, Yakṣa is "resolute will". The epiphany of Yakṣa in the *Kena Upaniṣad* is the appearance of the Resolute or Purposeful Will of Brahman as an apparition.

The *Mahābhārata* describes the image of an apparition. Yakṣa reveals himself to Yudhiṣṭhira when the latter arrives at a lake where each of his brothers had gone but none had returned (III.297.–III.299). Yudhiṣṭhira is astonished to see his four brothers lying beside the lake, motionless, lifeless, yet of healthy colour and unwounded. Filled with curiosity, he wades into the lake. Just then he hears a voice from the sky. It is the Yakṣa who says:

A crane that lives on duckweed and fishes,
I have brought your brothers in the power of death.
You, son of a king, shall be the fifth
If you do not reply to the questions I ask!⁴⁸

Standing on ground raised from the water (*setu-*) Yudhiṣṭhira sees the Yakṣa. He is odd-eyed, big-bodied (*mahākāya*), tall as a palm, glowing like a flash of lightning, unassailable, like a mountain. The Yakṣa warns him that the water cannot be drunk before answering a series of questions and that his brothers lie lifeless, having been heedless of the warning.

This scene contains some elements already encountered. The setting with inert heroic bodies, unwounded yet lifeless is somewhat reminiscent of the *Devas* as impotent victors in the *Kena Upaniṣad*; the role of the Yakṣa as one who poses questions is also present in this *Upaniṣad*.

Yudhiṣṭhira heeds the Yakṣa who then poses a large number of riddles for him to answer. The type of questions Yakṣa asks discloses much about himself as well. The

⁴⁶ Durgā is mentioned in the *Harivaṃśa* as the first among female Yakṣīs; M. Monier-Williams, *A Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, Oxford, 1899; under *yakṣī*.

⁴⁷ This definition of "Yakṣa" accords well with the etymology of the term *yakṣa*. Most scholars derive the term from the root *vyaks* "to be quick, to speed". Yakṣa and its Rig Veda cognates (*yakṣin-*, *yahu-*, *yahwā-*) are all derivatives of Old IA* *yah-*, Old IR* *yaž-*, IE *yagh-* "to flash, to flirt, to flow quickly or crookedly, to rush hither and thither" (J. Pokorny, *Indogermanisches etymologisches Wörterbuch*, Bern 1959, 502). From this, *yakṣa* – has the potential to develop connotations such as "a momentary apparition, a strange apparition, a wonderful manifestation, a flash of light" suggested by some scholars. M. Mayrhofer, (*Kurzgefasstes etymologisches Wörterbuch des Altindischen*, Heidelberg, 1976 Band III: Y-H), says that the primary meaning of *yakṣa*, n. is "appearance, shape or phenomenon (Gestalt); the later meaning is "apparition". See also Coomaraswamy, "Yakṣa of the Vedas", S. Sen, "On Yakṣa and Yakṣa Worship", *India Maior*. Congratulatory Volume presented to J. Gonda, Leiden, 1972, p. 187.

⁴⁸ *The Mahābhārata*, transl. and ed. by J.A.B. van Buitenen, Books 2 & 3, Chicago, 1975, p. 799.

questions deal preponderantly with the subject of *dharma* and the nature of the world and men. Yudhiṣṭhira answers them all correctly. For this, the Yakṣa allows him to choose the life of one brother. Pleased with Yudhiṣṭhira's choice and the rationale for that choice, the Yakṣa restores to life all four brothers, who rise with their faculties unimpaired. It is then Yudhiṣṭhira's turn to ask in amazement, "... who are you, a God who stands invincibly on one leg in the lake? I do not think you are a Yakṣa".⁴⁹ The Yakṣa responds:

I am your begetter, son, the God Dharma... I have come out of a desire to see you. Fame, truth, self-control, purity, uprightness, modesty, steadfastness, liberality, austerities, and chastity are my bodies. Nonviolence, equanimity, tranquility, austerity, purity, and unenviousness – know that these are the doors to me...⁵⁰

God Dharma grants three boons to his son who recognizes him as the "everlasting God of Gods". Then the God disappears.

We too, as Yudhiṣṭhira, have come face to face with Yakṣa due to one of the most explicit descriptions of what can be seen when the apparition occurs. The description goes a long way towards clarifying why early Yakṣa icons look the way they do. Is there a better general description of the Yakṣas from Noh, Parkham, Baroda, Deoriyā, plus Palwal, Patna, Haigunda, Vidiśā and Pratapgarh, than "tall as a palm tree", (presumably solid) like a mountain and big-bodied? Absent in this description are details concerning specific features by which mortals recognize each other. A colossal, glowing presence, without specifications, appearing like a flash of light, that is Yudhiṣṭhira's Yakṣa. In the same way, the early colossi concentrate more on the figure's pneumatic volumes and less on their adornment. An apparition is, after all, shrouded in mystery and vagueness. Yakṣa stands on a mound in the water, and this reminds that the findplace of quite a number of Yakṣa images is in or near the water.⁵¹ Yudhiṣṭhira's Yakṣa is odd-eyed (*virūpākṣa*). Any number other than the normal "two" is "odd-eyed". Even though the early colossi are in a poor state of preservation, the "odd-eyed" feature does not seem to be discernible. Perhaps the actual feature is not intended and *virūpākṣa* is used to call attention to the Yakṣa's supra-normal visual powers (this is the symbolic significance, for example of "three eyes"; see Chapter 12). The iconography of early Yakṣa images also does not show them standing on one leg as Yudhiṣṭhira's Yakṣa seems to do. But what the early images do show relates to the most important quality of Yudhiṣṭhira's Yakṣa. The Yakṣa possesses or represents life-force. When it is taken away, the material body becomes lifeless; when it is granted, the material body attains life. This is the power that can fell the four

⁴⁹ *Mahābhārata*, transl. van Buitenen, p. 804.

⁵⁰ *Mahābhārata*, transl. van Buitenen, p. 804.

⁵¹ A Yakṣa image was found at Bhilsa in the bed of river Betwa (Vetravati); V.S. Agrawala, "Yakshas and Nagas in Indian Folk-Art Tradition", *Folklore*, Vol. 7, 1966, 2. Two Vidiśā images (a Yakṣa and Yakṣī) "came to light due to a fall in the level of the Betwa River in the course of an unduly hot and long summer", Pramod Chandra, "Yaksha and Yakshi Images from Vidiśā", *Ars Orientalis*, Vol. 6, 1966, 158. The Deoriyā Yakṣa probably stood on the bank of, or in the water of, the Yamunā River. Today, the village of Deoriyā is not more than a kilometer from Bhīṭā, and Bhīṭā is less than 1 km. from this river. The Noh Yakṣa, mentioned above, was found at the bank of a tank. It would perhaps be useful to make a thorough investigation of the findplaces of the early colossal Yakṣas.

Pāṇḍavas, without causing injuries, and it can also restore them, intact. This is the power that seems to reside within the huge Yakṣa images whose rounded forms attest to the energy within, and whose draped, swollen middle represents the fertile womb.

Yudhiṣṭhira's Yakṣa possesses or represents the power of life. Umā's Yakṣa represents the Resolute Will of Brahman as does the Large Yakṣa who is the begetter of Prajāpati. These are Mahā Yakṣas, all, and they seem to be cosmic entities empowered with animating energy. The cosmic nature of Yakṣa in all these examples is predicated because they come after the transcendental Brahman but before phenomenal forms. In that sense, the Yakṣa is immanent but immaterial. That is why the Yakṣa is regularly described as a flash of lightning; it is a way of describing something whose appearance is incorporeal, immaterial. A Yakṣa has no real substance and that is why It appears as an apparition. Though prior to substantive forms, the Yakṣa can emit evolutes which ultimately give rise to phenomenal forms. The capacity for emission presupposes an interior fullness, which certain upaniṣadic thinkers already attributed to the Mahā Yakṣa. The Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad (5.4.1) knows that the Mahā Yakṣa is the first-born of the transcendental Brahman. When the same Upaniṣad intones "Fullness (*pūrṇa*) beyond, fullness (*pūrṇa*) here . . ." in the famous verse alluding to the inexhaustible plentitude of the creative Brahman in 5.1.1,⁵² we can be quite sure that the "fullness here" refers to the immanent Brahman, which could perhaps be understood as the Mahā Yakṣa. To conclude, the Vedic textual tradition establishes that a Mahā Yakṣa is the apparition of a cosmic entity empowered with an animating energy that accounts for Its fullness. This state of fullness is the essential nature of the Mahā Yakṣa in art.⁵³

Does this state account for the "Yakṣa" element in the Bhīṭā Caturvyūha image? The Bhīṭā Caturvyūha, like the Bhīṭā Pañcamukha Liṅga, is invented to transmit a rather complex theological doctrine. The *vaiṣṇava caturvyūha* doctrine emphasizes four successive emanations from the Supreme in order to explain cosmic creation and the relationship between the Supreme and Its creations. The Supreme is Nārāyaṇa, and, the first *vyūha* to emanate from Nārāyaṇa is Vāsudeva. Vāsudeva, in the Bhīṭā image somewhat resembles a Yakṣa (Pl. 15.1). His body is big and tall (167 cm. high and 58 cm. wide). His stomach is full and the tight girdle holding up the dhoti further accentuates its fullness. He holds a jar in his left hand which may associate him with the filled vase a symbol closely allied with Yakṣa and equally appropriate in the case of Vāsudeva. Indeed, Vāsudeva's position in the *vyūha* doctrine is not so different from that of the Yakṣa in the Brāhmaṇic texts just reviewed.⁵⁴ Yakṣa stands in relation to Brahman, as Vāsudeva does to Nārāyaṇa. Both are the "first-born" of the Supreme and stand mid-way between the Supreme and phenomenal creation. Both are themselves capable of emanating subsequent forms and indeed both do so from a state of "fullness" within. The Bhīṭā image

⁵² For an analysis of this verse see Chapter 8, pp. 89–90.

⁵³ Of course, not all early Indian yakṣas are Mahā Yakṣas images. For example, the Bharhut images though inscribed as "yakṣas" are not Mahā Yakṣas if they are not colossal, big-bodied, pot-bellied, free-standing and devoid of specificity.

⁵⁴ For *vyūha* notions in the Bhīṭā image, see D.M. Srinivasan, "Early Vaiṣṇava Imagery: Caturvyūha and Variant Forms", *Archives of Asian Art*, Vol. 32, 1979, 39ff.

has another anthropomorphic figure on the side opposite to the panel depicting Vāsudeva (Pl. 15.2). In its details, it is very distinct from Vāsudeva, so we may be sure that two different personages are intended. In the context of the *vyūha* doctrine, this personage is identified as Pradyumna, but Kapila (a fierce Raudraic figure) or a woman may also occupy this space.⁵⁵ In the Bhīṭā image, the figure seems to be Kapila; his big body is corpulent and his middle is even rounder than Vāsudeva's belly. As such, he also resembles a Yakṣa. Perhaps this is the time to remember that all four successive emanations, or *vyūhas*, are considered to be identical to the Supreme. Since entities equal to the same thing may be equal to each other, qualities of Vāsudeva should be found in Pradyumna even though he is the third *vyūha*.⁵⁶ His capacity to emit like Vāsudeva is, of course, evident since the fourth *vyūha* arises from Pradyumna. I am not able to explain why the second and fourth *vyūhas* are not depicted on the anthropomorphic model of the Yakṣa, but rather as heads plus theriomorphic forms later identified with these *vyūhas*. But perhaps a search for too close a series of correlations is unnecessary. After all, in order to explain the introduction of "Yakṣa" iconography in the Bhīṭā Caturvyūha image, I am not proposing that notions of "Yakṣa" influence the development of the *caturvyūha* doctrine, although the notions of yakṣa and *vyūha* probably do stem from the same tradition, namely ancient Hinduism.⁵⁷ I am proposing that when a need arose for a figural model on which to base the shape of a *vyūha*, that is, a non-phenomenal, cosmic manifestation, filled with the potential for life and capable of creating by the emission process, the model of the colossal Yakṣa could fulfill that need because its shape implied a similar nature.

⁵⁵ See D.M. Srinivasan, "Caturvyūha and Variant Forms", fns. 26 & 62.

⁵⁶ This sort of reasoning ought to be the basis for the descriptions of the *vyūhas* subsequent to Vāsudeva in the Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa. Images of Saṃkarṣaṇa, Pradyumna and Aniruddha, in III.85, should all look like Vāsudeva but have some distinguishing iconographic differences. See P. Shah, *Viṣṇudharmottara-Purāṇa*, Third Khaṇḍa, Vol. II. Baroda, 1961, pp. 162-163.

⁵⁷ See D.M. Srinivasan, "Caturvyūha", 48-49 for the Vedic and post-Vedic background on the *vyūha* doctrine. In addition to the Vedic passages on Yakṣa cited above, a recently found Yakṣa affirms the Brāhmaṇical character of the Yakṣa. The find is of a seated Yakṣa (1.35 cm. high; 66 cm. wide) having a protruding belly and a *yajñōpavīta* across the chest. The Yakṣa, assigned to the early centuries of the Christian era, was found in a village near Almora (Kumaon, U.P.); see N.P. Joshi, "Lāli (?) - A Unique Sculpture from Kumaon", *East and West*, N.S. Vol. 31, 1981, 131-132. Evidence hints that the Aryans brought the idea of "yakṣa" with them into India. The Kafir language, which is Aryan and pre-Vedic contains the term *yus* which corresponds to Skt. *yakṣa*-. See Gérard Fussman, "Pour une Problématique Nouvelle des Religions Indiennes Anciennes", *Journal Asiatiques*, 1977, 35-36.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

IN PRAISE OF HEROES (VṚṢṆI VĪRAS)

If only the soil of the subcontinent, and especially Mathurā, would yield ancient images that are indisputably Vṛṣṇi Vīras (Heroes), then the presently available, scattered data regarding their worship in the pre-Kuṣāṇa age would receive the expected corroboration. The reason to pursue the search for images of the Vṛṣṇi Vīras is that *vaiṣṇava* iconography, including the use of the multiplicity convention in a *vaiṣṇava* context, seems to begin here. As things now stand, there is pan-Indic archaeological, numismatic and inscriptional evidence attesting to the worship of the Vṛṣṇi Vīras, in addition to a seeming connection between Yakṣa worship (and imagery) and Vīra worship (and imagery), but no Indian pre-Kuṣāṇa image of a Vṛṣṇi Vīra can be identified with certainty. The Morā Well Inscription, dating to the early decades of the Christian era, kindles anticipation that images of Vṛṣṇi Vīras should be forthcoming in the Mathurā region. At Morā, a village seven miles from Mathurā, an inscription was found which states that images (*pratimā[h]*) of the blessed or deified (*bhagavatām*) five Vṛṣṇi Heroes (*vṛṣṇīnā[m] pañcavīrāṇam*) were installed in a stone shrine of a person called Toṣā.¹ Five Vṛṣṇi Vīras have been identified, from a passage in the Vāyu Purāṇa (97.1–2), they are Saṃkarṣaṇa, Vāsudeva, Pradyumna, Sāmba and Aniruddha.² The Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa mentions these five deities within a series that also includes Devakī, Yaśodā, Ekānaṃśā, Rukmiṇī, Satyabhāmā and Yuyudhāna.³ Except for Yaśodā, this is also a Vṛṣṇi group of gods, related either by blood or marriage. In one way or another, they are all kin of Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa, the god destined to become an avatāra of Viṣṇu and one of the most popular gods in Hinduism. The Morā Well Inscription is one of several testimonials of beliefs preceding and leading up to the formation of the great Hindu sect of Vaiṣṇavism. Vaiṣṇavism is preceded by the Bhāgavata religion of which the first stage is the cult of the Pañcavīra Vṛṣṇis. In the Vṛṣṇi lineage system, the senior-most person is the elder brother Saṃkarṣaṇa/Balarāma; Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa is his younger brother.⁴ The Vṛṣṇis are an important Kṣatriya clan of Mathurā; at times they held the rulership of this town, which seems to be their ancestral home.⁵ The apotheosis of Kṣatriya heroes, as recorded at Morā, is not an historical

¹ See H. Lüders, "Seven Brāhmī Inscriptions from Mathurā and Its Vicinity", *Epigraphia Indica*, XXIV, 1937–38, 194–200.

² J.N. Banerjea, *Religion in Art and Archaeology* (Vaiṣṇavism and Śaivism), Lucknow, 1968, pp. 12–13.

³ Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa III.85.71–79.

⁴ Seniority recognizes more than superior birth. It establishes a higher ritual status in Brāhmaṇic ritual. For example, the elder brother plays the dominant role in the important Śrāddha ritual, performed for the deceased parents.

⁵ For details see Doris Meth Srinivasan, "Early Kṛṣṇa Icons: The Case at Mathurā" in *Kalādarśana*, American Studies in the Art of India, ed. Joanna G. Williams, AIIIS, New Delhi, 1981, p. 129.

anomaly.⁶ The process whereby a Vīra becomes deified should have been known in greater India, according to the information gleaned from Pāṇini's *Aṣṭādhyayī*. According to IV.3.99, distinguished Kṣatriya heroes had already become objects of sectarian devotional worship (i.e. bhakti) before the time of Pāṇini, that is before circa the fifth/fourth century B.C.

The growth of the Vṛṣṇi Vīra cult, with its Pañcavīras, may have been influenced by contemporary Yakṣa worship. A group of Pañcavīra Yakṣas can be deduced from a passage in the Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa (III.222.13–15). The names of these five senior-most Yakṣas are: Dīrghabhadra, Pūrṇabhadra, Maṇibhadra, Yakṣabhadra and Svabhadra. Perhaps the Vṛṣṇis' set of Pañcavīras was modelled upon or evolved from such a group of Yakṣas. The *Culla Niddesa* indicates that worship to the Vṛṣṇi Vīras is on the same level as worship to a group of Yakṣas. The text includes, in a list of gods of popular worship, the names of Vāsudeva, Baladeva (i.e. Saṃkarṣaṇa/Balarāma), Puṇṇabhadda (i.e. Pūrṇabhadra) and Maṇibhadda (i.e. Maṇibhadra), in that sequential order.⁷ R.N. Misra cites information from the *Mahāniddesa* that may have the same implication; the *Puṇṇabhadda-vattikā* of this text mentions the "followers of Pūrṇabhadra" along with those of Vāsudeva and Baladeva.⁸ If these indications accurately reflect some interconnections between Yakṣa worship and Vīra worship, then it would seem reasonable to suppose that early Vīra images would have some Yakṣa components factored into them and that a pattern of provenances in Yakṣa art and Vīra art could be established. Some of the "Yakṣa" components in both the Malhar and Bhīṭā sculptures have already been mentioned above, and now the question of provenance can be noted. The Noh Yakṣa and the contemporaneous Bīrāvai Vīra (Pl. 16.10) stand within four miles of each other. The Deoriyā Yakṣa and the Bhīṭā Caturvyūha image, (expressing a theology having some antecedents in the Hero Cult)⁹ stand within one kilometer of each other. The Vidiśā Yakṣa (and Yakṣī) come from the same locality, and roughly the same time, as the Besnagar Garuḍa Pillar Inscription and the palm-leaf capital as well as the crocodile capital, all three testifying to the worship of Vṛṣṇi Vīras at Besnagar/Vidiśā.¹⁰ Most important, it can now be proposed that about eight miles from the Parkham Yakṣa, and the Baroda Yakṣa which is close-by, there probably stood, at Morā, images of three Vṛṣṇis, which are more contemporaneous with the Morā Well Inscription than either of the Yakṣas.

It has long been known that two male torsos and the lower half of a female figure have been found scattered in Morā.¹¹ Recent publications have a bearing on these three sculptural fragments. Although the heads, arms and legs are missing from the two standing males, the figures nevertheless exhibit very sensitive modelling in the areas of the

⁶ Further discussion on the cult of Heroes in Mathurā is found in Chapter 21.

⁷ Information cited by U.P. Shah, "Yakṣa Worship in Early Jaina literature, *Journal of the Oriental Institute*, Vol. 3, 1953, 55.

⁸ *Yakṣa Cult*, pp. 43 & 85.

⁹ See Doris Meth Srinivasan, "Caturvyūha", 48–51; plus below. The Pratapgarh Yakṣa comes from the same general region, but not close enough to belong to the same influencing locality or neighborhood.

¹⁰ The village of Bes or Besnagar has been identified with the ancient city of Vidiśā. The neighboring township of Bhilsa has been renamed Vidiśā in recent times.

¹¹ J.Ph. Vogel, "Explorations at Mathurā", *Archaeo. Survey of India, Ann. Rep.* 1911–12, pp. 127–128, Pls. LVII & LVIII.

abdomen, ornamentations and sashes circling the body. The first torso originally was two-armed (ht. 2' 3"; Pl. 16.1). A double necklace, held together with a large clasp on the chest, falls gently over both shoulders. The figure wears a dhoti, held in place by a rope girdle, tied in a generous knot, with ends looped and hanging below the rounded abdomen. The way in which the girdle is tied and the way it follows the curvatures of the hips, thighs, groins and round the abdomen exhibits a keen eye and a high degree of sculptural skill. A gathered sash is draped about the upper legs. Herbert Härtel has recently compared this torso to a Kuṣāṇa image of Saṃkarṣaṇa/Balarāma and thus concurs with the oft expressed opinion, including my own, that the Morā torso could be a Vīra.¹² The problem of dating the torso has also been reduced by the recent discovery of two inscribed doorkeepers from Mathurā (Pl. 16.2 & 3), which have stylistic affinities with the torso.¹³ It is not difficult to see, in these three sculptures, the similar treatment of the softly rounded belly whose deep navel further accentuates the soft skin. Likewise the tactile quality of drapery and ornamentation and their responsiveness to the contours of the body is quite similar. There is also congruency of dimensions, raising the possibility that were the Morā male (Pl. 16.1) intact he would attain the same height as the doorkeepers; the doorkeeper, identified as Agni (Pl. 16.2), measures nineteen inches from neck to belt, and the Morā torso measures twenty inches. The Brāhmī inscriptions on the pedestals of each of the doorkeepers allows for their dating within a margin of a few decades. According to the script, the inscription should be dated to the Kṣatrapa or very early Kuṣāṇa period. Word usage favors a dating closer to the Kṣatrapa period.¹⁴ That means that the doorkeepers are likely to date to the third quarter of the first century A.D. This date is therefore suitable for the Morā torso (Pl. 16.1), as well. The likelihood that it, as well as the other male torso, are Vṛṣṇi Vīras, is greatly enhanced by the identification which can now be offered for what remains of the female figure. Two pieces placed together make up the lower part of the standing female (height 3' 1"; Pls. 16.4a & b). She wears a short skirt, gathered in the front and having a looped sash on the right side. The skirt is secured by a simple girdle made of two strings. Over the left hand, placed at the hip, is draped a shawl which loops over the right calf as it swings to the back. Visually, the two large drapery loops on the right are the most distinctive aspects of the fragmentary statue. The statue has an inscription on the pedestal. It contains the names of Kaniṣka and Toṣā. Though this Toṣā associated with Kaniṣka is unlikely to be the Toṣā mentioned in the Morā Well inscription dated in the time of Śoḍāsa, the coincidence makes it most likely that the original Morā Well inscription referred to the place where the female and other sculptures were found.¹⁵ The female may well be Ekānamṣā, a Vṛṣṇi, and sister of Saṃkarṣaṇa/Balarāma and Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa. Ekānamṣā

¹² "Archaeological Evidence on the Early Vāsudeva Worship", in *Orientalia Iosephi Tucci Memoriae Dicata*, Roma, 1987, p. 581, fn. 25. The Kuṣāṇa torso (Mathura Mus. No. 17.1325) is illustrated in N.P. Joshi, *Iconography of Balarāma*, Fig. 16. The fact that the Kuṣāṇa torso is four-armed and the Morā torso is two-armed does not reduce the likelihood that they are both the same god. On this question see Chapter 18.

¹³ Doris Meth Srinivasan with Lore Sander, "Newly Discovered Inscribed Mathurā Sculptures of Probable Doorkeepers, Dating to the Kṣatrapa Period" *Archives of Asian Art* XLIII, 1990, 63–69.

¹⁴ Srinivasan with Sander, "Doorkeepers", pp. 64–65 and fn. 13, in *Archives*.

¹⁵ John M. Rosenfield, *Dynastic Art of the Kushans*, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1967, p. 151.

occurs on four known small Mathurā reliefs dating to the Kuṣāṇa period, which depict her between her two brothers. The reliefs are all kinship triads made in Mathurā in response to worship of the Vṛṣṇis, the town's ancestral heroes.¹⁶ Until the publication, in 1985,¹⁷ of the fourth relief from the Ellsworth Collection only damaged sections of reliefs were available. They do not show the full figure of Ekānamśā (A fifth Vṛṣṇi kinship triad in the Karachi Museum, Pakistan, may also originate from Mathurā; it is also a complete depiction on a weight stone, but it was never published by J. van Lohuizen-de Leeuw. Its details are difficult to determine from the xerox copy at my disposal).¹⁸ The Ellsworth Vṛṣṇi kinship triad clearly shows that the lower segment of the figure of Ekānamśā (Pl. 16.5) is much like the lower part of the Morā female (Pls. 16.4a & b). Both wear a short skirt which is secured by a plain, rope-like girdle; both show the two large drapery loops on the right side; both have the drapery end covering the left wrist which is placed at the hip; both stand, samapada, in the hieractic frontal pose; both wear large anklets at the feet. Indeed the only significant difference between the two is that the Ellsworth Ekānamśā carries a pot in her left hand which is absent in the Morā Ekānamśā. The major features of the lower parts of the two females are so close that their identity appears secure, especially as no other female type during the Kṣatrapa-Kuṣāṇa periods exhibits this combination of features. We may say that the "body language" of the Yakṣīs, the Goddesses of Fertility and Abundance is quite unlike that of Ekānamśā. It does not seem coincidental that the closest parallel, in boldness of stance and simplicity of adornment, is the representation of the Warrior Goddess, Durga (see Pl. 20.21). The hieractic frontality conveys strength and courage, qualities associated with Ekānamśā in the early literature.¹⁹ If, then, on the basis of favorable comparisons, the Morā female could be Ekānamśā and the one Morā torso could be Baladeva, then chances are good that the second two-armed Morā male torso could be Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa:²⁰ there is the evidence from the five Vṛṣṇi kinship reliefs showing this triad in Kuṣāṇa times, and, during the same period, there is the example from Gayā District of three separate statues of these Vṛṣṇis, as would be the case with the Morā triad.²¹ Were the identification accepted, these images could not be considered as three of the five Vṛṣṇi Vīras (Ekānamśā seems to be truly a heroine in the Harivaṃśā account) mentioned in the Morā Well inscription. The dates do not match. The inscription is from the time of Śoḍāsa, and the statues belong to the late Kṣatrapa (i.e. the two males) – and Kaniṣka (i.e. the female) period. The span of time between the execution of the male and female statues poses a problem if one wishes

¹⁶ See D.M. Srinivasan, "Early Kṛṣṇa Icons", pp. 127ff.

¹⁷ P. Pal, "Some Mathura Sculptures of the Kushan Period", *Annali*, Vol. 45, 1985, 632–634.

¹⁸ D.M. Srinivasan, "Early Kṛṣṇa Icons", see fn. 51.

¹⁹ Cf. P.L. Gupta, "Ekānamśā and Her Images", *Bihar Research Society Journal*, Vol. 54, 1968, 229ff.; see especially 229–231.

²⁰ This torso (Mathura Museum No. E 21) has a ht. of 3', but considerably more of the legs remain than on the other torso (Mathura Museum No. E 22, ht. 2' 3"). From the photo on Plate LVII (see fn. 11, above) it seems that E 22 (Saṃkarṣaṇa/Balarāma?) is more corpulent than E 21. Possibly this is the way status is designated in this set.

²¹ See D.M. Srinivasan, "Early Kṛṣṇa Icons", pp. 130–131. On the validity of comparing a two-armed with a four-armed Vṛṣṇi, see fn. 12, above.

to think of them as a unit. It is not easy to explain why it should take anywhere from \pm a quarter to \pm a half a century to complete one commission for three statues, and why the later one, of the time of Kaniṣka, should be of noticeably inferior craftsmanship than the other two. These uncertainties, plus the absence of distinctive attributes (usually found in the hands, or on the head, precisely the parts missing in these pieces) prevent complete acceptance that the Morā figures do in fact represent the triad of Vṛṣṇi Heroes. The probability is high, but the indisputable proof is lacking.

For pre-Kuṣāṇa images that are undeniably the Vṛṣṇi Vīras, it is necessary to go far beyond Mathurā's borders. To date, the earliest unambiguous images occur on coins of Agathocles found at Ai-Khanoum (Pls. 16.6 & 7).²² On the obverse, or Greek side, occurs the figure of Saṃkarṣaṇa/Balarāma, holding a club and a plough in right and left hands, respectively. On the reverse, or Brāhmī side, appears two-armed Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa holding the wheel and conch(?). The coins originate from the Northwest; they may have been minted in Taxila.²³ Accordingly, the Greek side is the more important side, with the result that Saṃkarṣaṇa/Balarāma is recognized as being senior to Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa. Thus on these coins, dating to the early second century B.C., the two figures occupy positions comparable to their status in the Vṛṣṇi lineage system. The other secure identification also comes from the Northwest. At Chilas II, Pakistan, on the western face of a rock, both an inscription and the representation of two male figures have been engraved (Pl. 16.8).²⁴ The larger figure on the left holds the club and plough in his two hands. The shorter figure holds the wheel and club. Again Saṃkarṣaṇa/Balarāma, because of his height, is being singled out as higher in the Vṛṣṇi lineage system than his brother. The inscription, mentioning *Rama [kri] ṣa < Rāma- kṛṣṇa-*, is dated on paleographic grounds to the first half of the first century A.D.²⁵ The possibility that Saṃkarṣaṇa/Balarāma is depicted on a few post-Mauryan punch-marked coins has been recently proposed.²⁶ The fragment of this coin type shows a standing figure holding a plough and a long stick, possibly Saṃkarṣaṇa/Balarāma's *musala* (Pl. 16.9). If accepted, this would be the god's earliest representation on coinage associated with Mathurā.²⁷ The problem is that so little

²² See R. Audouin et P. Bernard, "Trésor de Monnaies Indiennes et Indo-Grecques d'Ai Khanoum (Afghanistan)", *Revue Numismatique* 6e serie Vol. 16, 1974, 7ff.

²³ Audouin et Bernard, "Monnaies".

²⁴ This information was first published by A.H. Dani, *Chilas, The City of Nanga Parvat, (Dyamar)*, Islamabad, 1983.

²⁵ For the analysis of the inscriptions, consult Gérard Fussman, "Les Inscriptions Kharoṣṭhī de la Plaine de Chilas" in *Antiquities of Northern Pakistan*, Vol. I, Mainz, 1989, Inscription No. 1.

²⁶ P.L. Gupta, "Early Coins of Mathurā Region", in *Mathurā: The Cultural Heritage*, gen. ed. Doris Meth Srinivasan, AIIS, Manohar, New Delhi, 1989, p. 127.

²⁷ Gupta, "Coins of Mathurā", p. 136; fn. 12. Note that representations of Saṃkarṣaṇa/Balarāma have probably been identified on the coins of Maues, Azes I and a bilingual seal from Taxila and the representation of Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa is on a gold coin of Vāsudeva whose authenticity must still be accepted; oral communication of Joe Cribb, "Images of Indian Deities on North-West Indian Coins in the Pre-Gupta Period", Berlin Symposium, May 1986; see notice in Gérard Fussman, "Chroniques et Études Bibliographiques", *Journal Asiatique*, Tome CCLXXV, 1987, 363. Audouin and Bernard ("Monnaies", 20-21), seem to be correct in pointing out that a two-armed figure on the reverse of some of Viṣṇumitra's coins could well be Vāsudeva-Viṣṇu. Viṣṇumitra was king of the Pañcālas towards the close of the first century B.C. The coins are shown in J. Allan, *Catalogue of the Coins of Ancient India*, Repr. New Delhi, 1975, Pl. XXIX, Nos. 6, 8, 9.

of the figure remains and no other deity (Vṛṣṇi or otherwise) is depicted on the coin, making it impossible to assess hierarchical status.

For the present, the oldest examples attesting to worship of the Pañcavīra Vṛṣṇis outside of the Northwestern region are aniconic remains found in Besnagar. It has long been recognized that the Besnagar Garuḍa Pillar Inscription attests to the worship of Vāsudeva in circa the second/first century B.C. The inscription is carved on a pillar on which the Garuḍa capital is to be inferred.²⁸ Garuḍa can easily be associated with Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa (and not necessarily Viṣṇu), since the chariot of this god is marked by the Garuḍa standard, according to several passages in the Mahābhārata.²⁹ This pillar, it has recently been shown, stood beside other pillars with capitals at the Besnagar temple. Dr. Härtel has perceptively argued that two among the other pillars relate to two other Vṛṣṇi.³⁰ To wit, the remaining palm-leaf (*tāla*) capital should have crowned a *tāla*-dhvaja for Saṃkarṣaṇa/Balarāma and the crocodile or *makara* capital, a *makara*-dhvaja for Pradyumna. From the evidence of three probable Vṛṣṇi pillars, Härtel extrapolates to conclude that "it is obvious that in this temple at Besnagar . . . all the five heroes were worshipped".³¹ Be it three or five, Vṛṣṇis *were* worshipped in Madhya Pradesh, a place prone towards early support of Hero Worship.³²

Madhya Pradesh produced the first known image to fuse Yakṣa, Vīra and *vaiṣṇava* elements, and that fusion should now be analyzed. The Malhar image is big-bodied, stolid and stands close to the water (Pl. 15.3). These may be considered "Yakṣa" elements on account of descriptions pertaining to Yudhiṣṭhira's Yakṣa in the epic.³³ The large sword on the left side obviously belongs to the domain of the Vīra. The Bīrāvai Vīra is also outfitted with this weapon suspended from a belt onto the left hip (Pls. 16.10 & 11). The weapon may be an attribute associated with the Vṛṣṇi Vīras too. Saṃkarṣaṇa/Balarāma and Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa, on the Agathocles coin have a long sword suspended from the belt on the left (Pls. 16.6 & 7), just as the Malhar figure.³⁴ Aniruddha holds up a sword in his right hand in the fourth century Kondamotu relief depicting the Vṛṣṇi Vīras (Pl. 18.1).³⁵ It should not be forgotten that the wheel and mace held in the extra

²⁸ The inferences are based on two inscriptions. See D.C. Sircar, *Select Inscriptions I*, pp. 88–89; J. Agrawal, "Vidisha Stone Pillar Inscription of the Reign of Mahārāja Bhāgavata, dated Regnal Year 12", *Vishveshvaranand Indological Journal* Vol. III, 1965, pp. 99–100.

²⁹ See references in D.M. Srinivasan, "Vaiṣṇava Art and Iconography at Mathurā", in *Mathurā: The Cultural Heritage*, p. 385.

³⁰ Härtel, "Early Vāsudeva Worship", pp. 576–580.

³¹ "Early Vāsudeva Worship", p. 580.

³² Another Garuḍa pillar inscription was found at Bhilsa (see fn. 10), cf. Härtel, "Early Vāsudeva Worship", p. 579, fn. 21. In Pawaya (M.P.) a pre-Kuṣāṇa *tāla* votive emblem was found; see *Archaeo. Survey of India, Ann. Rep. 1914–15*, p. 21, Pl. XVIc.

³³ See Chapter 15, pp. 207–208.

³⁴ It must be registered that the identification of the object on the hip of the gods on the Agathocles coins is disputed. Paul Bernard sees, as I do, an encased sword (Audouin et Bernard, "Monnaies"). Gérard Fussman (*Inscriptions Kharoṣṭhi . . . de Chilas*, Insr. No. 1, p. 5), considers it an object, copied but misunderstood from the Indian context. Fussman rightly observes that the objects on the coins have no handle, but he does not compare their similar positions with the sword on the Malhar figure nor the Bīrāvai Vīra's sword held on the left hip by a strap crossing over the back.

³⁵ See Härtel, "Early Vāsudeva Worship", p. 576, fn. 9 and Pl. IIIc. This oft cited relief has only been correctly interpreted by Härtel in this paper.

arms of the Malhar figure are also connected with the realm of the heroic warrior: the wheel (*cakra*) is a weapon of war and the mace (*gadā*) is a symbol of sovereignty. It is therefore not surprising that when the cult of the Hero is given expression, Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa appears with the wheel (*cakra*) in hand, as on the Agathocles coins, and he holds both the wheel and the mace as on the Chilas II graffito. (The conch is also an heroic symbol, but it does not seem urgent to insist upon its symbolism here since this attribute cannot be defined with certainty in the Malhar sculpture). The natural hands (probably recut), holding the conch-like object, are poised in an unclear position which resembles the *añjali* mudrā (Pl. 16.12). This mudrā is adopted by the Vṛṣṇi Vīras appearing as ancillary deities on either side of a Tīrthaṅkara in Jaina reliefs of the Kuṣāṇa age.³⁶ Therefore it is not unbecoming for a Vīra to make this gesture, only unexpected in the Malhar image which appears to be a major, not an ancillary deity.³⁷ A deified Vīra need not wear a crown; this headdress does not occur in the Northwestern Vṛṣṇi Vīras, but it may be present on the Mathurā kinship reliefs dating to the Kuṣāṇa period.³⁸ If our guide is the later fourth century Kondamotu relief (Pl. 18.1), then the crown is (or becomes) the prerogative of Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa. Therefore this adornment on the Malhar image, as well as the puzzling dress (unless it is some kind of armour), need not define just a Vīra. The Malhar image is obviously not “just a Vīra”. The pull of tradition is so strong that a four-armed figure having *gadā* and *cakra* in the extra upper arms must signal a *vaiṣṇava* Vīra, and from all the foregoing, a *vaiṣṇava* Mahā Vīra (cf. Pls. 14.1 & 2). Who is he? Perhaps he is Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa. The two attributes, plus the crown favour him more than the other Vṛṣṇi Vīras. But it is not easy to think of the large Malhar image as representing Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa in his junior status as a Vṛṣṇi Vīra, unless that status is being conveyed by the hand gesture. Neither is it likely that Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa – first of the caturvyūhas – is being depicted here because no other vyūhas are present. From the benefit of hindsight, the image could well foreshadow Bhagavān Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa as the Mathurā artists of the Kuṣāṇa age will render him (see Plates 18.10 & 11): Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa is four-armed, crowned or turbaned, garlanded, well-ornamented and bearing the warrior’s emblems of strength and power, namely the mace, the wheel and (in later Kuṣāṇa images) the conch; these Kuṣāṇa representations reflect the *vīra* status even as they present a major Hinduistic deity. What is absent is the sword, so prominent in the Malhar image. Thus, whereas the Malhar deity gives the impression of a Mahā Vīra portrayed as God, the Kuṣāṇa deity gives the impression of a God portrayed as Mahā Vīra. The Malhar statue may represent the watershed between the worship of the younger brother, Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa, within the Vṛṣṇi lineage system and the glorification of Bhagavān Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa, the most popular Bhāgavata god in the Kuṣāṇa age. If this is so, then any meaning attributed to the Malhar Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa must take into account the transitional nature of the piece and give sufficient weight to the various factors in the process

³⁶ Examples are cited in Chapter 18; cf. also D.M. Srinivasan, “Vaiṣṇava Art”, pp. 386–387.

³⁷ I therefore do not share Härtel’s view that this figure could possibly be a Vīra were the hands not kept in *añjali* mudrā (“Early Vāsudeva Worship”, p. 581, fn. 26).

³⁸ E.g., compare the turbaned Vṛṣṇi Vīras on Pl. 16.5 with the crowned Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa on the remnant of the kinship relief picture in Fig. 3 of my “Early Kṛṣṇa Icons”.

of fusion. The Malhar Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa, it is proposed, represents the humane³⁹ apparition of a higher god. Elevated from the earthly warrior who blends strength and power of mind and body, Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa stands as a suprahuman sovereign whose ability to protect the safety of his followers and whose concern for their well-being is greater than any earthly lord.

The cult of the Vṛṣṇi Heroes plays a prominent role in the development of the *caturvyūha* doctrine and thereby, in the imagery representing that doctrine. The vyūha doctrine defines the fourfold nature of the Supreme Nārāyaṇa, a god stemming from the Vedic and Brāhmaṇic traditions, and associates this nature with four emanations (i.e. *caturvyūha*-) whose names do not come from the Vedic tradition but rather from the Bhāgavata religion and its worship of the Vṛṣṇi Vīras. In the doctrine, a realignment of relationships occurs so that a metaphysical hierarchy is now stressed over rank in the lineage. Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa, the first vyūha, supersedes Saṃkarṣaṇa/Balarāma, the second vyūha who arises from the first vyūha; Pradyumna the third vyūha arises from Saṃkarṣaṇa/Balarāma, and Aniruddha the fourth vyūha emanates from Pradyumna. The Hero Sāmba is dropped. The Bhīṭā Caturvyūha image, which expresses this theological position, elicits homage to the Vṛṣṇi Vīras (Pls. 15.1 & 2).

At present, the earliest impressive examples of *vaiṣṇava* art, such as the Morā figures, the Malhar statue and the Bhīṭā fourfold image praise Heroes, specifically Vṛṣṇi Heroes. Not enough is known about the Vīra Cult. Perhaps that is why these sculptures continue to pose numerous imponderables.

The sculptures of Saṃkarṣaṇa/Balarāma, for example, contain other than heroic factors. Indeed, this god's Kuṣāṇa representations fall into two rather distinct iconographic types, suggesting that he may be the amalgamation of several belief systems.⁴⁰ For some reason not entirely clear, the pre-Kuṣāṇa representations tend to combine, rather than separate, the types. The Jansuti Saṃkarṣaṇa/Balarāma (Pl. 16.13), usually taken as the oldest sculpture of this god because of its probable Śuṅga dating, displays both the snake canopy, the single earring and the *ekāvalī*, (associated with Type I in the Kuṣāṇa images) and the mace and plough (associated with Type II in the Kuṣāṇa images). The mid-first century B.C. large (1.170 m.), two-armed statue of Saṃkarṣaṇa/Balarāma, originating from Tumain (Guna District, Madhya Pradesh), features the same combination, with the important addition of a lion on top of the plough (Pls. 16.14 & 15). The latter attribute is a regular occurrence in Kuṣāṇa Type II imagery, but the appearance of the lion as an animal connected with Saṃkarṣaṇa/Balarāma is already found on the south side of the Bhīṭā Caturvyūha (Pl. 16.16). The lion-plough is also seen with the Kṣatrapa figure of Saṃkarṣaṇa/Balarāma, proving that this iconographic device stabilized fairly early in the artistic development of the god.⁴¹ Type II represents the typical Vīra depiction of this god, and, as is noticeable from the above as well as the Agathocles and Chilas examples,

³⁹ The quality of "humaneness" is symbolized by the four arms; see Chapter 18.

⁴⁰ D.M. Srinivasan, "Vaiṣṇava Art", pp. 388-389.

⁴¹ See this piece illustrated in Joshi, *Balarāma*, Fig. 9. Cf. remarks by D.M. Srinivasan, "Vaiṣṇava Art", pp. 383, 388-389 and by Härtel, "Early Vāsudeva Worship", pp. 582-583.

a snake-hood is not a typical feature of the god as a Vṛṣṣi Vīra.⁴² There is an exception; when this Vṛṣṣi Vīra appears as a Tīrthaṅkara's acolyte he may have the serpent-hood over his head (see Pl. 18.3). In order to fathom why this god's iconography comes from the chthonic, agricultural and heroic domains, his rise and development need to be researched further.

To account for incipient *vaiṣṇava* art, that is art prior to the Kuṣāṇa age, a wide net has been cast. The art has been mainly in praise of Heroes, to be precise, mainly Mathurā's Vṛṣṣi Heroes. They are known from Chilas in the North, to Malhar in the South to Vidiśā/Besnagar in the West. These far-afield places are linked through trade routes to Mathurā, and in some case, to each other. It is not surprising that centers as far afield as Taxila (assuming the Agathocles coins were minted there) and Vidiśā/Besnagar could yield early, unambiguous imagery of the Vṛṣṣi Vīras. These centers were situated on trade routes that already in the third and second century B.C. connected them to Mathurā. A Northern route, following the course of the Yamunā and then proceeding to the Northwestern terminii, connected Taxila to Mathurā.⁴³ A Southern route followed the Yamunā down to Kauśāmbī and Bhītā on its way to Prayāga (Allahabad).⁴⁴ At Kauśāmbī, a road went to the west coast, by way of Besnagar/Vidiśā, Ujjayinī etc.;⁴⁵ another went farther south in antiquity, passing (via Bharhut) "through the present districts of Satna, Shahdol, Bilaspur and Raipur. Important towns like . . . Mallālapattana" [later Malhar] "were located on this route".⁴⁶ Mathurā's contact with these places on the Northern, Southern and Western routes is corroborated by the dispersal range of certain etched beads. Tracing the geographic extent of two patterns of etched beads, it is possible to conjecture that Mathurā had connections with settlements on these three routes from circa the Mauryan period through circa the first century B.C.⁴⁷ At times during the first century B.C. and the first century A.D., Chilas could have been pulled into this network by a road linking it to Taxila. Two routes joined at Taxila. The one which went through present-day Abbotabad (and ultimately to present-day Śrinagar) had a road branching off from Abbotabad which led West and North. It went to the regions in the Upper Indus Valley where *inter alia* Chilas is located.⁴⁸ Judging from the Kharoṣṭhi graffiti found at Chilas and recently analyzed by Gérard Fussman, he proposed that Chilas in the first

⁴² This is borne out by the fourth century depiction of the god on the Kondamotu relief.

⁴³ Cf. S.G. Bajpai, "Mathurā: Trade Routes, Commerce, and Communication Patterns, from the Post-Mauryan Period to the End of the Kusana Period", in *Mathurā: The Cultural Heritage*, p. 47 and see Map: "Mathurā: Inland Trade Routes"; H.P. Ray, "Early Historical Urbanization: the case of the Western Deccan", *World Archaeology*, Vol. 19, No. 1, 97.

⁴⁴ Cf. Bajpai, "Trade Routes", p. 48.

⁴⁵ Ray, "Western Deccan", 97; cf. Bajpai, "Trade Routes", p. 48.

⁴⁶ Professor K.D. Bajpai, Dr. S.K. Pandey, *Malhar 1975-78*, Sagar, 1978, p. 22; also p. 21.

⁴⁷ See C. Margabandhu, "Etched Beads from Mathurā Excavations - A Note" in *Mathurā: The Cultural Heritage*, pp. 202-203; cf. discussion in Chapter 21 on further implications of the dispersal range of Patterns Nos. 2 and 6.

⁴⁸ Gérard Fussman, "Taxila, The Central Asian Connection", in *Urban Form and Meaning in South Asia*, Vol. 31 in *Studies in the History of Art*, eds. Howard Spodek and Doris Meth Srinivasan, National Gallery of Art, Hanover & London, 1993, p. 86. Some of the place-names, though not the routes, can be found on the Map opposite the title page of *Zwischen Gandhāra und den Seidenstrassen, Felsbilder am Karakorum Highway*. Exhibition Catalogue, Prof. Dr. K. Jettmar; Dr. V. Thewalt; Mainz am Rhein, 1985.

century A.D. was also situated on a trade road. On it travelled relatively cultivated merchants from the Northwest of India. Among them were some who had knowledge of the Vṛṣṇi Vīras.⁴⁹ That Northwesterners would be receptive to the worship of Mathurā's Heroes need not entirely surprise us; the region could well have been exposed to the Hellenistic notion of the Hero Cult in places like Taxila and Ai-Khanum for quite a long time.

The cult of the Vṛṣṇi Heroes spread far and wide from Mathurā, but a rigid formula for their representation did not fan out with the spread of the cult. The variety of aniconic and iconic representations is keenly evident, each locale adding or devising some variation. Among these, however, one locality stands out as truly innovative in the pre-Kuṣāṇa age. It is Bhīṭā. In the present state of our knowledge, we can say that the first Caturvyūha image (Pls. 15.1 & 2; 16.16) was invented here, along with a number of other innovations. Bhīṭā invented the first Pañcamukha Liṅga (Pls. 14.3 & 4). Two colossal Yakṣas come from these environs; one of them, the Deoriyā Yakṣa has the accoutrement of highest status, and is therefore unique among Yakṣa images. One anthropomorphic pot, of the sort deemed seminal to the development of iconography, can be attributed to Bhīṭā (Pl. 14.10). Bhīṭā, situated between two epicenters of commerce and religion, Kauśāmbī and Prayāga, probably owes her circumscribed burst of artistic activity to her favorable geographic position and to the fact that no other locale had as yet sufficient resources to command the development of an artistic school.

⁴⁹ Fussman, "Inscriptions Kharoṣṭhī . . . de Chilas", pp. 32-33. The area may however have been in direct contact with Mathurā. In correspondence, dated December 13, 1988, Professor Fussman indicates that a graffito from Hunza dating to approximately the same period (c. end of first century A.D. - second century A.D.) attests to the travels of a man from Mathurā to Hunza; the Hunza inscription is still unedited.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

RELIGIOUS NETWORKS AND INCIPIENT ŚAIVA FORMS

Pre-Kuṣāṇa śaiva forms come from many different places, however they share a sophisticated symbolic language not imposed from any one place upon the other. To appreciate the unusual manner in which śaiva art opens, it must be remembered that pre-Kuṣāṇa śaiva art comprises, at the present state of our knowledge, less than a dozen stone sculptures, possibly one terracotta, some coins and a seal. The earliest representations go back to the second century B.C. (i.e. the Śuṅga period), and the latest can be dated to the mid-first century A.D. That means that we have very few representations during a long period of time and that these few representations from scattered places show an interconnected, mature iconography.

Consider:- there are three early plain Liṅgas found at two different sites which display the same basic conventions in their representations.¹ There is the colossal, free-standing Liṅga from Kaṅkālī Tīlā, Mathurā (ht. above ground: 38.2"). It is realistically conceived and composed of three parts; these are the dome, the shaft and the base set in the ground (Pl. 17.1). This Liṅga dates to circa the first century B.C. It resembles another plain Liṅga on an altar (*vedi*), under a tree depicted on a Mathurā relief from Bhūteśvara (Pl. 17.2); the relief dates to the same period. Both Mathurā Liṅgas have a simple band encircling the dome, otherwise they are not different from the third plain Liṅga located in Reh, Fatehpur Dist. U.P. The site is on the left bank of the Yamunā, about 350 kms. southeast of Mathurā. The Reh Liṅga is also composed of three parts: there is the dome (68 cms.), the shaft (77 cms.) and presumably the base set in the ground. The Reh Liṅga bears an inscription which had been attributed to the time of Menander by G.R. Sharma who first published the Reh Liṅga.² None of the subsequent publications mentioning this inscription agree with this dating.³ Since the inscription seems to date somewhere between the first century B.C. and no later than the time of Wīma Khadphises in the first century A.D., and since the Reh Liṅga resembles closely the earliest plain Liṅgas from Mathurā of the first century B.C., the Reh Liṅga can best be discussed here. When these three Liṅgas are taken together, it is apparent that there is general agreement with respect to colossal size, threefold division and realistic appearance. This agreement exists in spite of the considerable distance separating the sites in antiquity, and, (depending upon

¹ The plain liṅga in the Śiva Temple at Chennittalai in Kerala is not included here. T.A. Gopinath Rao (*Elements of Hindu Iconography* Vol. II, Pt. 1, p. 69 & Pl. 5.1), calls it "ancient", but it does not look so ancient.

² G.R. Sharma, *Reh Inscription of Menander and the Indo-Greek Invasion of the Gāṅgā Valley*, Allahabad, 1980, p. 10.

³ B.N. Mukherjee, *Mathurā and Its Society*, Calcutta, 1981, pp. 245-265; P.L. Gupta, "Kushāṇas in the Yamuno-Gangetic Region. Chronology and Date", *Annali dell'Istituto Universitario Orientale di Napoli*, Vol. 45, 199ff.; cf. I.K. Sarma, *The Development of Early Śaiva Art and Architecture*, Delhi, 1982, p. 60.

the final date of the Reh inscription) in spite of a possible gap in time which could extend over several generations. An association between a tree and the Liṅga, such as is seen on the Mathurā relief (Pl. 17.2), is also confirmed on indigenous coinage. On the obverse of Allan's variety e of Class 1 Ujjayinī coppers, the Liṅga is seen between two different trees in railings. A Liṅga together with the bull of Śiva (see below), also occurs on the reverse of the second century B.C. coppers (variety b) of the Arjunayanas whose lands probably lay within the Delhi-Jaipur-Agra triangle.

Consider-: there are four pre-Kuṣāṇa Mukhalingas from three different sites which display subtle, interrelated features. From Bhītā (Allahabad Dist. U.P.) comes the famous Pañcamukha Liṅga; of buff coloured sandstone, this Liṅga is dated by inscription to the second century B.C. (Pl. 14.3). Already its iconography is a mature one, and now is the time to notice details not previously mentioned. The central shaft is carved in the shape of the two-armed Īśāna whose straight strands of hair fall on his shoulders. In the left hand, bent at the elbow, he holds a water pot; the right hand was probably raised in *abhaya* mudrā. The oblique parallel lines across the chest could either be the border of a scarf or the *yajñōpavīta*, the latter being the more likely. Under his arms the four different heads, or mukhas, can be distinguished. Directly below the left arm is the Aghora mukha (Pl. 17.3). Next, moving counter clockwise, is the mukha representing the ascetic or Yogīc nature of Śiva (Pl. 14.4; face to the proper right of the central face). Next follows the Uṣṇīṣin form, represented by a head wearing a turban with a topknot. (Pl. 14.4 center, Pl. 17.4 on the right). The fourth, adorned with earrings necklace and fillet around the hair, is likely to portray the mild, feminine (Strī) nature of Śiva (Pl. 17.4 center). For the next known Mukhalinga we must go upstream along the Yamunā again, to Mathurā. There in circa the first century B.C. was produced the Ekamukha Liṅga now housed in the Philadelphia Museum of Art (Pl. 17.5). It shares a realism with the plain Liṅgas just reviewed. An incised rim circles the dome just above the central fold, and above this point the human head occurs. The treatment of the ringlets of hair in which a snake slithers, and, the wide open eyes, also indicate a first century B.C. date.⁴ In the first century A.D., the greater Mathurā area produced two different yet interrelated Ekamukha Liṅgas. Carved on an architectural fragment from Mathurā is an Ekamukha Liṅga with the Yogīn Head (Pl. 17.6). The Liṅga, installed upon a *vedi* platform under a tree, retains the realistic dome which is adorned with a patterned band (Pl. 17.7). From Aghāpura (now Bharatpur Dist. Rajasthan, but in antiquity within the cultural domain of greater Mathurā), comes the colossal (ht. 5') realistic Liṅga showing the Uṣṇīṣin mukha on its shaft (Pl. 17.8).⁵ The mukha appears just below the central fold, contrasting thereby with the Philadelphia Ekamukha Liṅga from Mathurā. But in another respect, the Aghāpura

⁴ Cf. the first century B.C. Bodhi Gayā railing pillar depiction of Indra and the first century B.C. Mathurā representation of a noble (Mathura Museum No. E 7) for similar treatment of the eyes and the hair. Stella Kramrisch (*Manifestations of Shiva*, Philadelphia, 1981, p. 2) dates this Liṅga to the first-second century A.D.

⁵ For the stylistic analysis on which the first century A.D., pre-Kuṣāṇa date is based, see my paper "Significance and Scope of Pre-Kuṣāṇa Śaivite Iconography", *Discourses on Śiva*, ed. Michael W. Meister, Philadelphia, 1984, p. 36. Plate 24 illustrates this piece: the label has been incorrectly printed. Instead of "Phase 3" read "Phase 2". See Footnote 23 (below) for the correct labelling of the numerous incorrectly printed captions of my illustrations in this publication.

Ekamukha Liṅga compliments the Mathurā output. It and the Ekamukha Liṅga on the Mathurā relief (Pl. 17.6) feature as mukha, one of the four mukhas on the shaft of the earlier Bhīṭa Pañcamukha Liṅga. In limiting the choice either to the Yogīn mukha or the Uṣṇīṣin mukha, these two Ekamukha Liṅgas already make the same choice – for the main mukha – as is made in the subsequent Kuṣāṇa age (see Chapter 19).

Consider: there are four pre-Kuṣāṇa stone representations of the full figure of Śiva from scattered places, and these display iconographic links though little overall similarities. The Guḍimallam Śiva Liṅga (Chittoor Dist., Andhra Pradesh), whose exact date is still under dispute, is agreed to be the earliest.⁶ Two-armed Śiva, carved in high relief before the Liṅga, stands astride upon the shoulders of a creature belonging to the aquatic realm (Pl. 17.9). The god, with *jaṭābhāra* hair, holds a small horned animal in the lowered right hand, a battle-axe and water pot in the left. His lowered *membrum virile* is seen through the drapery folds of his thin dhoti. The aquatic nature of the crouching being has been established in a recent excavation.⁷ In effect, both god and Liṅga seem to arise from out of the waters. The Guḍimallam Liṅga, as is well known, is very realistic, and in that respect, is like the early plain Liṅgas. Also like them, it is very large (c. 5' in ht.), and it has the threefold division. A free-standing Śuṅga colossus of Śiva Ūrdhvaretas was found at Rṣikeśa (U.P.). Of the red mottled sandstone associated with Mathurā sculpture, and 4' 9" in height, this is a stolid image of the god (Pl. 17.10). He is two-armed, having the water pot (*kamaṇḍalu*) in the left hand and gesturing in *abhaya* mudrā with the right. The image is badly preserved and it is not clear whether the protruberance on the head is the topknot of the ascetic's locks or of the god's turban. This image of ithyphallic Śiva seems to have been made in Mathurā and sent North. On the side of a pillar (circa 5' ht.), now in the Mukṭā Devī Temple in Mūsānagar (near Kanpur, U.P.) occur two reliefs of Śiva. The pillar was probably made in that area and dates somewhere between circa mid first century B.C. and circa mid first century A.D.⁸ In the center of one relief is a two-armed male crowned with the pre-Kuṣāṇa type of fluted turban⁹ (Pl. 17.11). He is seated in *lalitāsana* on an elaborate seat which resembles a throne. The figure's raised phallus indicates that this is Śiva. He holds his right hand in *abhaya* mudrā while the left, poised on the folded left leg, holds a water pot. He wears a dhoti and ornaments consisting of double-looped earrings and simple bracelets. Beneath his throne lies a lion. Three male figures are shown in the process of emerging from the central figure. Two appear to arise from either side of his shoulders; they are two-armed and wear headgear. The third emerges directly from the god's turban. The strands of hair of the emerging figure fall unto his shoulders, and in his arms, bent at the elbows, he holds two objects

⁶ On the dating see Srinivasan, "Pre-Kuṣāṇa Śaivite Iconography", pp. 33–34; N.P. Joshi, "Early Forms of Śiva", *Discourses* (see fn. 5), p. 48; G. von Mitterwallner, "Evolution of the *Liṅga*", *Discourses*, pp. 12ff.; Gerd Kreisel, *Die Śiva-Bildwerke der Mathurā-Kunst: Beitr. zur frühhinduist. Ikonographie*, Monographien zur Archäologie, Kunst und Philologie; Band 5, Stuttgart, 1986, p. 83.

⁷ I.K. Sarma, "New Light on Art through Archaeological Conservation", *Journal of the Indian Society of Oriental Art*, n.s. 10 (1978–79), 51; cf. Srinivasan, "Pre-Kuṣāṇa Śaivite Iconography", p. 42.

⁸ See N.P. Joshi, "A Unique Figure of Śiva from Mūsānagar", *Bulletin of Museums and Archaeology in U.P.* 3 (1969), 25–30, Srinivasan, "Pre-Kuṣāṇa Śaivite Iconography", p. 39.

⁹ On this type see Srinivasan, "Pre-Kuṣāṇa Śaivite Iconography", p. 36.

which are probably the sun and the moon. On the adjacent side of this pillar is a relief of a standing Śiva having some features in common with the seated Śiva. The standing god is ithyphallic (Pl. 17.12). His right hand is in *abhaya* and the left holds the water pot near the waist. A lion and a small yakṣa flank him on the right and the left, respectively. In addition, on a unique Śuṅga terracotta of unknown provenance C. Sivaramamurti sees Śiva, Lord of Music and Dance, depicted.¹⁰

A few pre-Kuṣāṇa coins and a seal from the Northwest also picture the full figure of Śiva. On a rare coin type of the Śaka king Maues, the god is shown striding and holding a club and trident.¹¹ A copper seal from Sirkap, of about a century later, shows Śiva also striding and carrying the trident and club in his right and left hands, respectively. This seal from Taxila is inscribed in Brāhmī and Kharoṣṭhī characters of the early first century A.D. Śiva is also represented on the silver coins of the Indo-Parthian king Gondophares. The god is portrayed as two-armed, carrying a trident in his right hand and a palm-branch in his left;¹² or, the trident may be held in the god's left hand.¹³ In both types, Śiva stands with his weight on the right leg. Though these representations from the Northwest are certainly within the domain of *śaiva* iconography, they are noticeably different from the representations occurring in the rest of the subcontinent.

Consider: there are three pre-Kaniṣka non-anthropomorphic symbols of Śiva which seem to be known on a pan-Indic scale. The bull on indigenous coins has already been dealt with.¹⁴ In brief, it is seen on coins from Almorā (in the Himalayas), Mathurā, Kauśāmbī and the Uttar Pradesh area ruled by the Ārjunāyanas. As a group, they span between the third century B.C. to the first century A.D. The Audumbaras, a Punjabi tribe especially devoted to Śiva, also feature the bull on some silver coins. The coins may have been issued during the first century B.C.¹⁵ Depiction of the Indian humped bull on foreign coinage can be noticed in the coins of the early Indo-Greek king, Apollodotus I. But it is not possible to determine whether it is an allusion to Śiva's humped bull. Perhaps the bull on the obverse of the coppers of Azes II in Gandhāra begins the allusion to Śiva on coinages of the Northwest. D.W. MacDowall outlines the stages on coinages that begin with the symbolic and go to the anthropomorphic representations of Śiva as follows: "... first by the bull alone on this issue of Azes II, then by the bull and *nandipāda* symbol on the copper coins of his successor the satrap Zeionises, and finally with the bull, *nandipāda* symbol and the anthropomorphic figure of Śiva holding his trident standing in front of the bull, now clearly Nandi on the extensive copper coinage of the Kuṣāṇa king Vima Kadphises".¹⁶ The lion is seen to the left of a tree-in-railing motif on a Taxila

¹⁰ C. Sivaramamurti, *Natarāja in Art, Thought and Literature*, New Delhi, 1974, Fig. 4. Cf. Joachim K. Bautze, *Early Indian Terracottas* Leiden, 1995, p. 25.

¹¹ See Percy Gardner, *The Coins of the Greek and Scythic Kings of Bactria and India in the British Museum*, Reprint, New Delhi, 1971, p. 71, Pl. 17.3.

¹² Gardner, *Coins*, p. 104, Pl. 22.8.

¹³ Gardner, p. 104; Pl. 22.9.

¹⁴ In Srinivasan, "Pre-Kuṣāṇa Śaivite Iconography", p. 35.

¹⁵ See John Allan, *Catalogue of the Coins of Ancient India*, Reprint, New Delhi, 1975, p. 123; p. 125.

¹⁶ D.W. MacDowall "The Development of Buddhist Symbolism on the Coinages of the North West", in *Investigating Indian Art*, M. Yaldiz, W. Lobo eds. Berlin, 1987, p. 183. MacDowall notes (p. 188), that the first

copper of Allan's Class 5, var. k.¹⁷ This combination hardly appears further south, but the appearance of a lion with Śiva in both reliefs of the Mūsānagar pillar may be recalled; the possibility of foreign influences in the Mūsānagar reliefs has been commented upon earlier.¹⁸ The trident is a symbol favored for several centuries primarily in the Northwest. It appears alone on the coins of Wima Khadphises. As an attribute of two-armed Śiva, it appears on the coins of Wima Khadphises and then with four-armed Śiva on the coins of Kaniška.¹⁹ But it also occurs on the coins of the Audumbari kings as trident, or, trident with ax on square coppers (to the right of a storeyed temple)²⁰ and on round silver coins (together with an elephant; a tree-in-railing motif).²¹

The geographical spread of the limited number of śaiva forms issues a caution: it may be unwise to consider any one area as the cradle of śaiva art. A string of sites must be reckoned as the provenances of the above mentioned stone images. From Mathurā come two plain Liṅgas and two Ekamukha Liṅga representations; from Aghāpura, neighboring Mathurā, comes one Ekamukha Liṅga; from the area of Mūsānagar (on the Yamunā, in Ghāṭampur District, circa 42 miles south of Kanpur), comes the pillar with the two śaiva reliefs; from Reh comes one plain Liṅga; from Bhīṭā comes the only Pañcamukha Liṅga; from Guḍimallam comes the only full figure of Śiva in front of the Liṅga. It is true that more stone images come from the Mathurā area than any other area during this span of circa 250 years. But when the Mathurā output is compared with the originality of pieces made elsewhere, then a preeminence in formulating major forms of śaiva art cannot be attributed to Mathurā. Taken as a whole, these works are not stamped by the influence radiating from one artistic center, or, from a place peripheral to such a center.²² That is, it is hard to assign one artistic source for either the iconographic or the stylistic conventions seen on the stone pieces. It is difficult to detect (save in the Mathurā-Aghāpura connection which is in the same geographical sphere), an impact of one piece upon another; it is not possible to claim, for example, that a form such as the Pañcamukha Liṅga established in one place, was simplified into the form of the Ekamukha Liṅga in some other place. It is equally difficult – if not inappropriate – to try and rank these works with respect to greater or lesser degrees of expressive skills, or, greater or lesser degrees of acceptance or rejection of some acknowledged artistic ideals. The reason for these difficulties is not so much because of the dearth of images. It is because these images do not primarily relate to each other on artistic terms. But relate to each other they surely do, for they share numerous symbols apparently already codified as being appropriate to the domain of Śaivism and śaiva art. If we stop for a moment to consider afresh the nature of these symbols so well-known to us, their specificity cannot go unnoticed:

anthropomorphic representations of Śiva on coinage occur under Gondophares, whose rule overlaps that of Kujula Khadphises.

¹⁷ Allan, *Catalogue*, p. 235.

¹⁸ Srinivasan, "Pre-Kuṣāṇa Śaivite Iconography", p. 42.

¹⁹ See Chapter 19, p. 267; fn. 51.

²⁰ Allan, *Catalogue*, pp. 122–123; 125.

²¹ Allan, *Catalogue*, pp. 123–125.

²² Some of the following concepts draw upon Jan Bialostocki's "Some Values of Artistic Peripheries", *World Art* I, pp. 49ff.; see full citation of the publication in fn. 46, Chapter 14.

the Liṅga, the Mukhalinga, an ithyphallic god, sometimes with *jaṭābhāra* locks. Such symbols could never have been invented independently at various sites.

How did these scattered sites relate to each other? An attempt to isolate the communicatory forces binding localities is the first problem addressed in this chapter. The second is the problem of the significance, especially the significance of *śaiva* forms with the multiplicity convention. The two problems are understood to be connected in that the cultural forces responsible for the transmission of a symbolic language are likely also to provide a key to significance of the symbolic language. Parenthetically, the question of chronology is not reopened; unless otherwise stated, the relative chronology and descriptive details supplied in my earlier study, are still operative.²³ The problem at hand is to gain insight into the ways by which knowledge of a symbolic language and its iconographic expression could occur at scattered sites without the benefit of an artistic "school" to disseminate ideas and conventions.

A

The sites of *śaiva* art are scattered but not irregularly so. Most can be located on, near to, or between rivers and towns considered sacred. Many of the sites are on holy rivers. With respect to the Yamunā, Mathurā, Mūsānagar and Reh lie on it. Bhītā, also on the Yamunā, lies between Kauśāmbī and Prayāga (modern Allahabad), the spot marking the confluence of the Yamunā, the Gaṅgā (and the hidden Sarasvatī). Rivers and confluences became sacred early on; the Mahābhārata recognizes their sanctity.²⁴ The Yamunā is "a river that delivers from evil, one should do ablutions, intent on the worship of ancestors and Gods, and he will achieve a Horse Sacrifice, and go the greatest journey".²⁵ The Gaṅgā is labeled "sacred" in the epic which contains many verses in honour of its greatness and sanctifying activity.²⁶ Mathurā, a town on the Yamunā, excelled – in the words of the epic – in "the worship of ancestors and Gods". Prominent male and female ancestors of the Vṛṣṇi clan were worshipped in Mathurā, their legendary ancestral home.²⁷ Yakṣas and Nāgas were worshipped there in pre-Kuṣāṇa times. A cult to Balarāma may have existed at the time.²⁸ Such names as Śivadatta and Śivaghoṣa, borne by Kṣatrapa rulers of Mathurā, would indicate that Śiva was held in high esteem there. And of course the town contained the followers of Buddhism and Jainism. The great diversity of cults and deities at Mathurā during these early periods provides background for Ptolemy's

²³ The relative chronology given in my "Pre-Kuṣāṇa Śaivite Iconography", divides the material into a Phase 1 and a Phase 2. The captions accompanying the article carry incorrect "Phase" labels and introduce a spurious Phase 3. The correct Plate numbers and chronological phases are: Plates 18–23 Phase 1; Plates 24–31 Phase 2.

²⁴ Cf. P.V. Kane, *History of Dharmaśāstra*, Vol. IV, Poona, 1953, pp. 559ff.

²⁵ *The Mahābhārata*, trans. van Buitenen, Book III.83.55–56, p. 395.

²⁶ E.g. see Kane, *Dharmaśāstra* IV, pp. 585–587.

²⁷ See D.M. Srinivasan, "Early Kṛṣṇa Icons", pp. 127–136 and Chapter 16.

²⁸ See D.M. Srinivasan, "Vaiṣṇava Art", pp. 383–384; 388–389.

reference to "Modoura, the city of the gods".²⁹ Bhītā, in addition to its location on the left side of the Yamunā, was situated between one of the largest cities in antiquity (Kauśāmbī)³⁰ and one of the holiest spots (Prayāga). "There is no place", says the Mahābhārata (III.83.74), . . . "holier than Prayāga". By the time of the Matsya Purāṇa, one of the oldest purāṇas, the vicinity around Prayāga was recorded as being infused with sanctity.³¹ This area, or Prayāga-maṇḍala, five yojanas in circumference, would include Bhītā within the sacred sphere; it is uncertain however whether this circle of sanctity was already distinguished in pre-Kuṣāṇa times. Reh, although today described as a "derelic mound",³² could have interlaced in antiquity with sacred and secular localities due to its location on the Yamunā and its being 96 kms. northwest of Kauśāmbī. Thus, these sites in present day Uttar Pradesh may not have stood in isolation of each other. These sites yielding pre-Kuṣāṇa śaiva art may well have been settlements connected in a sacred geography.

Location in a sacred geography, it is proposed, exposed a locality to the flow of religious concepts due to the movement of pilgrims. The notion of "pilgrimage" and the idea of "making a tour of holy sites" to gain religious merit were accepted beliefs during the periods of our concern. The Mahābhārata contains the first Hinduistic account of a journey undertaken to visit a series of *tīrthas*,³³ or holy places. The Pāṇḍavas, during their stay in the forest, decide to make a pilgrimage (Book III.80–153). The benefit of visiting a great number of the holy places is equated with the reward gained from the performance of Vedic *śrauta* rites. For example, a visit to Mahākāla, a sacred spot in Ujjayinī, and bathing at the Ten-Million-Ford equals the reward attained from a Horse Sacrifice. It is interesting to observe with Bhardwaj that the Mahābhārata's pilgrimage account shows a clustering of *tīrthas* in four regions of India. The largest number of *tīrthas* are located in two regions in the Gaṅgā basin: 1) the upper reaches of Gaṅgā and Yamunā, and 2) the eastern part of modern Uttar Pradesh. Some degree of clustering is also in 3) the modern Tamilnadu and Southern Andhra region, and 4) the Narmada-Ujjain area in Madhya Pradesh.³⁴ It is immediately apparent that the indigenous locations of the earliest śaiva forms are, for the most part, in these regions: the Śiva Ūrdhvaretas (probably made in Mathurā) is found in region 1; the Guḍimallam Liṅga is from region 3; the Ujjayinī coppers showing the Liṅga are from region 4; and Mathurā (-Aghāpura),

²⁹ Ptolemy 50. See *Ancient India as described by Ptolemy*, by J.W. McCrindle, Reprint, New Delhi, 1974; p. 129.

³⁰ Dieter Schlingloff, *Die altindische Stadt*, Wiesbaden, 1969, p. 28. The author estimates that Kauśāmbī may have had between 90,000–180,000 inhabitants; Ujjayinī between 30,000–60,000 and Bhītā between 10,000–20,000.

³¹ The passage in the Matsya Purāṇa is quoted by Kane, *Dharmaśāstra* IV, p. 598.

³² Sharma, *Reh*, p. 1.

³³ On "tīrtha", see L. Renou, *Vocabulaire du Rituel Védique*, Paris, 1954, p. 70. Renou notes that the meaning of the term in a Vedic ritual context is "access". Cf. D. Eck, "India's Tīrthas", *History of Religion*, Vol. 20.4; 1981, 323ff. She emphasizes a Vedic meaning "threshold" and does not take notice of Renou's publication.

³⁴ S.M. Bhardwaj, *Hindu Places of Pilgrimage in India (A Study in Cultural Geography)*, Berkeley, Los Angeles, London, 1973, pp. 33–34.

Mūsānagar, Reh and Bhītā images are from the general area of region 2.³⁵ The overall convergence of pilgrimage clusters with the provenances and findspots of early śaiva art suggests one way, perhaps among several, by which a well-defined symbolic language could be transmitted and articulated plastically in many different places.

In modern times, places in a sacred geography become centers for the circulation of ideas, especially during the time of major religious events and fairs. Pilgrimage places play a role not only in disseminating new ideas and reinterpreting religious beliefs,³⁶ they also affirm traditional mythologies, beliefs, kinship ties and communal ties. The annual Rām-līlā performance observed at Mathurā, for example, effectively disseminates traditional Hindu mores, mythologies as well as a sense of social unity among the audience.³⁷ A modern pilgrimage center is also a meeting ground for heterogeneous beliefs; it is a node attracting cultural and religious diversity. "A priest from the region of Maharashtra who travels a thousand miles north to Banaras for learning the Vedas resides in a Maharashtrian school and studies Sanskrit under a Marathi-speaking teacher; he perceives but does not visit the school for Tamil Brahmins nearby, and the temple built by Bengalis around back. He also witnesses, but does not participate in the local festivities of the Banaras region, below his windows".³⁸ The modern religious center or sacred place can be a microcosm of diverse Indian religious groups. These groups have usually traversed a prescribed sacred circuit to converge at the sacred place. Thus the impact of a sacred geography extends, in modern times, beyond the sacred nodes to include pilgrimage routes as well. These two, the routes and the nodes, form religious networks. The networks provide spheres of contact between many kinds of religious travellers. "By moving through the religious networks, by joining in the life of those microcosmic centers which are sacred cities, Hindu pilgrims become aware of Indian civilization as multiple orderings of diversity".³⁹

It seems quite possible that in antiquity similar channels existed whereby symbols and meanings could be transmitted among different religious groups. There is little research or documentation on the manner in which religious notions were transmitted among people in antiquity (i.e. in contradistinction to rulers transmitting notions by their proclamations).⁴⁰ However, the ability for exchange within a sacred circuit may be proposed

³⁵ According to Bhardwaj however, (*Pilgrimage*, p. 44), the pilgrimage sequence described in the Mahābhārata would go along the Gaṅgā and avoid the Yamunā.

³⁶ Cf. Bhardwaj, *Pilgrimage*, pp. 207-210.

³⁷ See Norvin Hein, "The Rām Līlā" in *Traditional India: Structure and Change*, Philadelphia, 1959, pp. 89-91.

³⁸ Bernard S. Cohn and McKim Marriott, "Networks and Centres in the Integration of Indian Civilization", *Journal of Social Research*, Vol. 1, 1958, 7.

³⁹ Cohn and Marriott, "Networks", 7.

⁴⁰ There are useful works, besides Bhardwaj and Eck cited above, such as A. Bharati "Pilgrimage in the Indian Tradition", *History of Religion*, Vol. 3.1, 1963, 135ff.; A. Bharati, "Pilgrimage Sites and Indian Civilization", *Chapters in Indian Civilization*, ed. Joseph W. Elder, Madison 1961, pp. 83-126. But these studies do not try to fathom how tīrthas may have helped transmit ideas in antiquity. What has not been attempted for the ancient periods is what B.N. Goswamy does (in "History at Pilgrim Centers: On Pattas Held by Families of Priests at Centers of Hindu Pilgrimage", *Sources on Punjab History*, Delhi, 1975, pp. 339-373), for more modern times.

because similar religious networks existed and similar socializing opportunities existed in ancient times as in modern times. The beginnings of Buddhist art were stimulated in just such a manner, according to the eminent French art historian Alfred Foucher. The germ, according to him, began at the four sacred Buddhist spots where souvenirs were created for, and bought by, pilgrims who then disseminated them far and wide via pilgrimage routes.⁴¹ This observation acknowledges that in the past, as in the present, something is always brought home from a pilgrimage. New impressions, religious souvenirs, gifts are distributed as a result of exposure to a sacred place. In antiquity, religious centers or holy places could act as points of contact between Brahmanism (with its emphasis on performance of Brahmanic rituals) and Hinduism (with its emphasis on bhakti devotions to a particular chosen deity), since some Brahmanic rites needed to be performed at *tīrthas* where bhakti devotions were practiced. The important ceremony honouring the dead, Śrāddha, has to be performed at most famous *tīrthas*, Gayā being the foremost.⁴² Certain rites of atonement (Prāyaścitta) are to be conducted at *tīrthas*;⁴³ a Vedic rite for prosperity should take place at a confluence.⁴⁴ Travelling in the circuit to a holy place permitted movement through towns of religious heterogeneity. Mathurā was such a town. Though not a *tīrtha* in antiquity, it became a microcosm of diverse religious beliefs. Mathurā, with its temples, religious plays, Vedic rites, Bhāgavata shrine(s?) and ceremonies, establishments of the various heterodoxies – all requiring active religious personalities – Mathurā could offer travellers and inhabitants an awareness and a vivid impression of “multiple orderings of diversity”. In such a climate, Brahmanic and Hinduistic thought could be exchanged. Further, the town was (and is) situated on an active pilgrimage route. In ancient days the region was part of a Buddhist religious network as well. A route leading through Mathurā was taken by Fa-Hsien in the fifth century A.D. when that Chinese monk travelled to visit the sacred Buddhist places in India. His travel account is the first historical account of a pilgrimage undertaken in India. It is significant that Region 2 is also included here, an indication of the longevity and sacral diversity of this network.

Another factor promoting exchange and adoption, besides physical contact within sacred circuits, is the great prestige that Brahmanism enjoyed during these ages. It needs to be underscored that from the downfall of the Mauryas to circa the end of the sixth century A.D., an unprecedented number of great monarchies in northern and southern India, as well as smaller oligarchies, used Vedic sacrifices and Brahmanism as symbols of culture and authority. The rulers may have personally followed a Hindu sect (usually Vaiṣṇavism), but they gave public display to the great Vedic sacrifices, while they practiced general tolerance of all religions.⁴⁵ Even the foreign dynasty of the Kuṣāṇas allowed Brahmanism to prosper in areas under its immediate control.⁴⁶ It is not difficult to imagine

⁴¹ A. Foucher, *The Beginnings of Buddhist Art*, rev. by author and transl. by L.A. Thomas and F.W. Thomas; reprint, Varanasi 1972. Chapter I, pp. 1–28.

⁴² The Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa (Chap. 85), mentions about fifty-five; Kane, *Dharmasāstra* IV, 616.

⁴³ Bharati, “Pilgrimage in the Indian Tradition”, 139.

⁴⁴ Jan Gonda, *Vedic Ritual, The Non-Solemn Rites*, Leiden-Köln, 1980, p. 237.

⁴⁵ A.K. Narain, “Religious Policy and Toleration in Ancient India with Particular Reference to the Gupta Age”, in *Essays on Gupta Culture*, ed. Bardwell L. Smith, Delhi, 1983, pp. 17–51.

⁴⁶ On this point see, Chapter 21 and my Introduction in *Mathurā: The Cultural Heritage*.

an exchange of information among the different religious personalities active at both the little courts and the big courts, especially since discussion among religious professionals at court has a long tradition in India. During the first millenium B.C., the courts were the "clearing houses of new information"⁴⁷ about rituals and their philosophies. The catholic posture of later rulers could well continue this aspect of life at court and contribute to the lack of tension between Brahmanism and Hinduism. The effects of this religious climate and its fostering of religious networks can be gauged by signs of reciprocal adaptations. First, Brahmanic worship was affected by Devotionalism (i.e. *bhakti*). Some Brahmanic rites incorporated icons (i.e. of Viṣṇu) or objects that functioned as icons (i.e. the Mahāvīra vessel), and some included the worship of Hinduistic gods (i.e. Gaṇeśa).⁴⁸ Conversely, *bhakti* was affected by Brahmanism. Perhaps the most telling indicator of this force working in sectarianism is the nearly complete convergence of findspots of Liṅga, Mukhaliṅga and ūrdhvaretas Śiva images within an area identified as the country of the Aryans (Āryāvarta in the Mānava Dharmaśāstra;⁴⁹ See Map A). Even Guḍimallam and Ujjayinī which fall outside of Āryāvarta, may well belong to areas integrated into Aryan culture, as the pilgrimage clusters in the epic suggest.⁵⁰ The geographic congruency between domains of Brahmanic culture and localities yielding Liṅga and Mukhaliṅga and ūrdhvaretas images strongly suggests that Brahmanism is responsible for the adoption and advancement of the worship of the *membrum virile* in Śaivism. The congruency also seems to support our earlier finding that Hindu Śiva developed more from within the Vedic tradition than from outside of it.⁵¹

Knowledge, dissemination and utilization of *śaiva* symbols found in *śaiva* art may be the result of prevailing religious ideas and attitudes flowing freely from one place to another along religious networks. In particular, a set of interrelated factors would be present at such sites which would foster transmission of *śaiva* symbols. To enumerate them: long, prior familiarity with the Vedic god Rudra-Śiva; a certain lack of tension between Brahmanism and Hinduism; continued visibility of the main conveyor of Brahmanic symbolism, the *yajña*; and, opportunities for the observation of other cult practices (i.e. prayers, offerings, ritual accoutrements) both in Brahmanism and Hinduism, as well as the heterodoxies. The possibility for these forces to flow through settlements in a sacred circuit, it is believed, had a fertilizing effect upon iconography in general, and with respect to *śaiva* art, it helped formulate the vocabulary of *śaiva* iconography at the various places. Writing in 1985, one Indian anthropologist has called the organization of

⁴⁷ J.A.B. van Buitenen, "Vedic and Upaniṣadic Bases of Indian Civilization", *Chapters*, (full ref. in fn. 40), p. 12.

⁴⁸ See Gonda, *Non-Solemn Rites*, pp. 22; 355–356, for use of an image of Hastimukha (= Gaṇeśa), in the worship of Vināyaka (*Baudhāyana-Grhya-Śeṣasūtra* 3, 10).

⁴⁹ Mānava Dharmaśāstra II.22. In contrast, the regions decidedly outside of the Brahmanic cultural milieu produced no sculptural or numismatic examples of the Liṅga or Mukhaliṅga. The region east of Uttar Pradesh, extending through present day Bihar and Bengal, and the entire region north of Mathurā, extending northerly and northwesterly to the Indo-Iranian borderlands, the Hindu Kush, and southern Bactria do not fashion representations of the Liṅga or Mukhaliṅga during our timeframe.

⁵⁰ Bhardwaj, *Pilgrimage*, pp. 35–42.

⁵¹ See, for example, Chapters 5, 6, 9, 10.

the Hindu pilgrimage “democratic” in that caste, sex and sect restrictions are absent.⁵² Should such democratic tendencies have been in existence in ancient times, an incipient iconography may have benefitted from them. Moreover, such tendencies would have come in addition to the religious and political factors promoting and disseminating knowledge of Brahmanic symbolism among a broad social spectrum.⁵³

Information gained experientially by witnessing rituals and religious dramas had the potential to penetrate among the different classes (and subsequent castes), that is, among possible patrons and artisans of icons. Theoretically, only the three upper classes could witness Brahmanic events; in practice it is difficult to surmise whether or not a greater segment of the population could have had the opportunity to hear about, if not to actually see, these types of performances. Exposure to ancient Hinduism’s integrative forces would have provided opportunities for artisans to execute the conventions demanded of them by their patrons, belonging to various castes.

It must be assumed that forces aiding the transmission of symbols could and would also transmit the meanings of the symbols. The meanings may not, at all times or in all cases, be accepted, but the ties and continuities between ancient Hinduism and Hinduism proper are sufficiently close to suspect proneness towards acceptance. This assumption presumes therefore that were Vedic meanings for “*liṅga*” and “*mukhaliṅga*” forthcoming, they could well have been transmitted along with the symbols themselves.

B

Previous studies have refrained from deriving the significance of the *śaiva* Liṅga from Vedism because of the assumption that Liṅga-worship means adoration of the sexual organ, and the Vedas do not demonstrate a Brahmanic tendency towards adoration of the phallus. The belief in a non-Vedic origin for the Liṅga image has always rested on this assumption. The assumption must however be laid to rest since it is demonstrable that *liṅga* in Vedic and epic literature has meanings devoid of priapic content, and, that these meanings connect with Śiva.

An understanding of the significance of the *śaiva* Liṅga can begin with the Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad, the earliest treatise expounding on the personal god, Rudra-Śiva.⁵⁴ In this Upaniṣad, *liṅga* means “sign”, a non-material and therefore unchangeable sign testifying to the ulterior existence of something else (see Chapters 9 & 19). The same work refines this meaning further. Liṅga is non-material in the sense that it is prior to gross matter, but subsequent to pure spirit. Being thus between the two – spirit and matter – *liṅga* is “subtle matter/subtle form”; gross material form can arise from it. This Upaniṣad already

⁵² Makhan Jha ed., *Dimensions of Pilgrimage, An Anthropological Appraisal*, New Delhi, 1985, pp. 13–14.

⁵³ Note the discussion on the communicatory role of the ritual upon the three upper castes in Chapter 14. See Chapter 21 for a discussion on symbols communicated to large segments of society from the domain of religious dramas.

⁵⁴ For a complete survey of the term *liṅga* in early literature see D.M. Srinivasan, “Pre-Kuṣāṇa Śaivite Iconography”, pp. 39ff.

has formulated a meaning for *linga* which is congenial to the meaning the later āgamas confer upon the Linga of Śiva.⁵⁵ The later meaning is this: a Linga is the sign of the Spirit, or better, the sign of the Absolute. The earliest carved Lingas can be understood as forms referring to the transcendental god; they declare the presence of that which is non-manifest and non-corporeal.

If a Linga is a sign referring to the transcendental god, why does that form take on the shape of a large, realistic phallus? Here too, Brahmanic literature offers some guidance. An instructive Vedic passage indicates that in the Saṃhitās, the phallus is the sign symbolizing the creator's capacity for unlimited production. The passage occurs in the Atharva Veda, in Hymn X.7 to Skambha (lit. "prop, support, pillar"). Skambha is the cosmic generative force whence the entire material world originates (see Chapter 3). However, Skambha is not postulated as the active demiurge who gives rise to phenomenality. Rather, Skambha is the Cause which gives rise to the Agent who in turn takes over the creative process. As such, Skambha generates Prajāpati. It is thus of more than passing interest that a *vetasa hiranyāya*⁵⁶ ("a golden phallus") standing in the water represents the hidden (*guhya*) Prajāpati (v. 41). What is being said is that the first evolute of cosmic creative energy is a hidden, or unperceivable progenitor symbolized by a golden phallus in the water.

The image presages *linga* symbolism. The Sautika Parvan (Mahābhārata 10.17), relates how Brahmā told Mahādeva to create, but Śiva saw the defects of living creatures and did *tapas* in the water for a long time.⁵⁷ After a long time, Brahmā decided to create another progenitor, Prajāpati (10.17.16), who proceeded to give birth to many creatures. Śiva rose out of the water and saw that beings had, in the meantime, been created. He tore off his *linga*, placed it in the ground and withdrew to perform *tapas* at the foot of the Muñjavat Mountain. For our purpose, this epic passage is highly important. First, it associates unambiguously the meaning of "phallus" with the term *linga*, an association not readily discernible in the Vedic texts. Second, Śiva's *linga* is emblematic not of his personal sexuality but of his cosmic creative energy. Third, the myth in its specific details contains mythopoeic imagery overlapping with the Atharva Veda account: the golden phallus (*vetasa*) in the water as sign of the unseen creator has become the phallus (*linga*) of Śiva submerged in the water in preparation for creation. Further, in the light of the epic and Vedic passages, it seems reasonable to conclude that Śiva's act of castration is brought about because his *linga* has been rendered useless by the *linga* of Prajāpati. Prajāpati's *linga* has usurped the function of Śiva's *linga*. The story thus bridges the Atharva Veda account and other epic and purāṇic passages associating Śiva's *linga* with his potentiality for cosmic creation.

⁵⁵ See Hélène Brunner, "Toujours le Niṣkala-Linga", *JA*, Vol. 256, 1968, 445-447; D.M. Srinivasan, "Śaiva Temple Forms: Loci of God's Unfolding Body", in *Investigating* (see fn. 16), pp. 338-340; cf. Chapter 19, pp. 271-273.

⁵⁶ A *vetasa-hiranya-* is frequently cited in Vedic literature (e.g. RV 4.58.5; TS 4.2.9; Mahānārāyaṇa Upaniṣad vs. 369). *Vetasa-* may mean both "stick, reed" and "phallus" and therefore has lent itself to punning such as in RV 4.58.5, noted by L. Renou, *Hymnes spéculatifs du Veda*, Paris, 1956, 232-233.

⁵⁷ On this myth, see R.G. Bhandakar, *Vaiṣṇavism Śaivism and Minor Religious Systems*. Reprint. Varanasi, 1965, pp. 113ff. Cf. Wendy D. O'Flaherty, *Asceticism and Eroticism in the Mythology of Śiva*, Ist Indian Impression, 1975, New Delhi, p. 131.

A definition for “Linga” according to Brāhmaṇical literature, can now be proposed: the “Linga” is the subtle, unchangeable sign of the otherwise unknowable, transcendental and unseen godhead. This sign is in the form of a phallus to symbolize god’s capacity to generate life. The definition is applicable to a śaiva Linga on the strength of the epic account. It is a definition compatible with subsequent śaiva tenets and symbols, especially stemming from the āgamas. The fact that the Brāhmaṇic tradition can yield a basic definition for the Linga, and the fact that images of Lingas, Mukhalingas and ūrdhvaretas Śiva concentrate in regions where Brahmanism is most dominant (see Map A) make it quite difficult to insist on the non-Vedic origin and significance of the Linga icon.⁵⁸

When a Linga is conjoined with heads, or mukhas, the latter are to be interpreted as projecting from the Linga. The idea that these two entities are conjoined by attachment is contrary to the purpose of the Mukhalinga’s theological statement.

Mukhas represent the beginning of a process initiated by the transcendental godhead. Mukhas are the first part of god’s body moving towards manifestation. A Mukhalinga image, in effect, announces the beginning of the process of divine manifestation. Mukhas therefore are forms connoting further movement; they are part of a dynamic process. The non-static nature of a *mukha* is quite evident in the Agnicayana ritual. The orthopraxy assures that in this *yajña*, *mukha* connotes “the head or first element when more of the body is forthcoming”.⁵⁹ This connotation is neither confined to the Vedas, nor is it an archaism when used in the later literature. The meaning of *mukha* as “beginning” or “initial part of a set” is attested to in epic and later Sanskrit works. The use of *mukha* in mathematical treatises is most revealing. The term can be used to signify “the initial quantity of a numerical progression”.⁶⁰ Thus, in the mathematical context, *mukha* retains the connotation of “first member when more is to follow”. The idea that *mukha* in the compound Mukhalinga signifies simply “head” is misleading; here too *mukha* suggests the first element of god unfolding from out of his cosmic essence (i.e. *liṅga*).

Divine manifestation is the quiddity of the Linga. Symbolic of the Unseen and empowered to emit all material forms, it follows that the first form to arise out of the Linga is the visible form of the creator. A Mukhalinga image represents the emergence of Śiva, the Creator, who desires to reveal his body, ostensibly for the purpose of worship. God moves towards manifestation as a baby moves towards birth: the head projects first. The Linga pushes out Mukhas that it stores within, much as Queen Māyā pushes out the Buddha-to-be, and the head and torso project first (Pl. 17.13).

Usages of “mukha” and “liṅga” in the ritual and the texts indicate knowledge of the unfolding process. In addition to the Agnicayana, there is the evidence from the Mahānārāyaṇa Upaniṣad, a text close in time to the initial Mukhalinga images. This text contains reference to five names which the later tradition assigns to the Mukhas of the Linga; moreover, the names come after a set of *liṅga* verses. The order in which the

⁵⁸ Until this position is accepted, it will be greeted by reactions not unlike that of Partar Mitter [reviewing *Discourses on Śiva*] in the *Times Literary Supplement* for the 24th of January, 1986, p. 78.

⁵⁹ See Chapter 14, p. 193.

⁶⁰ See Chapter 11.C.

prayers are spoken indicates the awareness that “mukha” succeeds “linga” and a likely knowledge of the progressive unfolding of Mukhas from Linga.⁶¹

A Pañcamukha Linga represents the unfolding of the fivefold nature of the Supreme Śiva. Why is the god’s nature fivefold and not some other number? The answer lies in the language of “five” (see Chapter 12). “Five” denotes “total comprehensiveness, physical and metaphysical completeness”. “Five” expresses the idea of temporal and spacial completeness. “Five” or “a fifth” expresses linkage between the terrestrial and cosmic planes as well as their penetration. “Five” is the mid point around which the earthly quadrants are stabilized; this position offers additional symbolic associations. “Five” or “a fifth” is a position replete with connotations of superiority above the terrestrial sphere. “Five”, accordingly is charged with “the supramundane” and “the realm of the spirit”. In attributing to god a fivefold nature, god is being equated with the universe, and, the universe with god. A fivefold god is all cosmic matter. A fivefold god is coexistent with the terrestrial and cosmic planes. A fivefold god is the omnipotent creator and the foundation of the universe. Fivefoldedness, in short, declares the awesome glory of Śiva.

In spite of its aptness to convey Śiva’s glory, fivefoldedness was not invented by the Śaivas. Ancient Hinduism had already invented the notion of a fivefold creator. Prajāpati, the creator god of the Brāhmaṇas, is composed of five bodily parts.⁶² His body is identified with the five layers of the Agnicayana altar. An early upanishad, the Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad, wishing to express the nature of the All, called Ātman, engages in a description of its fivefold composition.⁶³ Śiva seems to inherit fivefoldedness as an expression of his universality and potentiality to create. It follows that the Pañcamukha Linga is the theoretical model for all Mukhalingas.⁶⁴

The Bhīṭā Pañcamukha Linga symbolizes the emergence of fivefold Śiva, Creator and Ruler over his creations (Pl. 14.3). The fifth and central form dominates in the sculpture just as the concept of “five” or “the fifth” dominates in the theological meaning of a Mukhalinga. The name of the fifth and most important form is Īśāna. This is the last name in the series of “mukha” names invoked in the Mahānārāyaṇa Upaniṣad; it is also a name that already occurs in the Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad to characterize Rudra-Śiva as the Lord, who is the sovereign (*prabhu* 3.12) and ruler of immortality (*amṛtatvasyeśāna* 3.15). In fact, Īśāna is associated with the creative energies of Vedic Rudra-Śiva right from the beginning of Vedism.⁶⁵ In the Bhīṭā image more than the head of Īśāna is visible; his complete upper portion is manifest. So, from the earliest representation in art, “mukha” can either be “head”, or, “head and more of the forthcoming body” and reflect the connotations of “mukha” derived from the ritual practice of the Agnicayana. Īśāna controls the orientation of the Bhīṭā image. This fact has led to the interpretation that the four heads appearing below the torso of Īśāna face not in the usual cardinal directions, but in the unusual direction of the interstices.⁶⁶ Whereas I once concurred with this

⁶¹ See details in Chapters 10 and 19.

⁶² Chapter 6, p. 66.

⁶³ Chapter 8, p. 91.

⁶⁴ On this see also Chapter 11.C, pp. 150–151.

⁶⁵ See Chapter 2, re: RV 2.33.9 and its analysis.

⁶⁶ N.P. Joshi, *Catalogue of the Brahmanical Sculptures in the State Museum, Lucknow*, Lucknow 1972, p. 101.

interpretation, I no longer believe it to be the best explanation for the orientation of the mukhas. Another possibility exists which finds support from other examples of Pañcamukha Liṅga images. First, it is possible that Īśāna faces an interstice and that the four heads face in the cardinal directions. The advantages of this possibility are twofold: the heads usually do face in the cardinal directions, and, the fifth head can face an interstice on some of the known examples.⁶⁷ Second, Īśāna, does not *define* an interstice because his movement is upwards. Whereas he may *face* into one of the earthly directions, just like the other mukhas, Īśāna moves *upward*. His partially exposed figure grows upward, occupying the fifth cardinal point, namely the zenith. The association of the "fifth cardinal point", or the center, with the zenith is well established in both the Vedic and Hindu traditions.⁶⁸ In other examples of Pañcamukha forms, the fifth face is associated with the zenith by central placement and its apical, upward-facing position. In the Bhīṭā Liṅga, Īśāna's large, commanding outward expanding form gives true expression to "five" (and "the fifth") as "orientation *for* ascension".⁶⁹ Some of Īśāna's attributes (e.g. the long strands of hair, the water pot and the *yajñopavīta*) bespeak of the asceticism of the Yogīn or Brahmācārīn.⁷⁰ The water pot held in the left hand may also evoke the full vase (*pūrṇa ghaṭa*). Its appearance here, as well as on all four of the earliest stone icons of Śiva, suggests that the water pot, like the *pūrṇa ghaṭa*,⁷¹ is a life-symbol, symbolic perhaps of the panoply of Śiva's life-giving energies.⁷² Īśāna's probable gesture of *abhaya* made with the right hand, implies that he can grant emancipation. The different features of the other four heads symbolize the facets that make up the nature of the Supreme. Each specific mukha seems to answer a particular aspect of Rudra-Śiva enounced in the Śatarudrīya litany, chanted upon the completion of the piling up of the Agnicayana altar. They, plus Īśāna, define the Creator as he comes into view. Perforce, these five aspects define the Absolute in its anthropomorphic form.

No early text affirms that an Ekamukha Liṅga has the same theological intent as the Pañcamukha Liṅga, yet I am quite sure it cannot be otherwise. Already it has been observed that the mukhas of the early Ekamukha Liṅgas can be of the Yogīn and Uṣṇīṣīn types, both of which appear on the Bhīṭā Pañcamukha Liṅga. This shows some relationship between an Eka- and a Pañcamukha Liṅga, but not much more. There is however more evidence on the conceptual connections between "one" and "five"; the evidence comes from the language of numbers:

⁶⁷ See examples in Madanjeet Singh, *Himalayan Art*, Greenwich, 1968, Pl. on p. 10 and Pl. on p. 139. For discussion and detailed photos see Thomas S. Maxwell, "The Five Aspects of Śiva", *Art International*, Vol. XXV, 1982, 41–57. An exception is the medieval Virinchipuram Pañcamukha Liṅga which has the fifth face inclined upward and directly facing East; see I.K. Sarma, *Early Śaiva Art*, Plates 46–48.

⁶⁸ See Chapter 12, p. 164, and Abel Bergaigne, *La Religion Védique d'après les hymnes du Rig-Veda*. Tome II, Paris 1883; pp. 125–126.

⁶⁹ David M. Knipe, *In the Image of Fire*, Delhi, 1975, p. 10.

⁷⁰ For the iconography pertaining to the ascetic, see my "God as Brahmanical Ascetic: A Colossal Kuṣāṇa Icon of the Mathurā School", *Journal of the Indian Society of Oriental Art*, N.S. Vol. X, 1978–1979, 1ff.; cf. also Chapter 19, p. 276 for the main characteristics of the Yogīn and Brahmācārīn mukhas.

⁷¹ Cf. Chapter 15, pp. 202–203.

⁷² However, when in śaiva art the water pot is combined with such attributes as the rosary and the antelope skin, the source and significance of these attributes relate to the priest and ritual practitioner.

The connection between “one” and “five” may well begin with the Indo-European evidence showing that the number “five” originally designated the completion of the counting of the fingers on one hand.⁷³ In the Vedas, the idea of a unity, namely “one” and the multiplicity of its manifestations can be rendered by numerical symbolism.⁷⁴ The Vedic orthopraxy is once again a bridge. It gives corporeality to relevant symbolic expressions. The main object of worship in the Pravargya is the Mahāvīra pot which needs to be made of five components. These are several kinds of clay and other ingredients.⁷⁵ The components are ritually mixed and moulded into the three clay balls which constitute the one pot, having anthropomorphic properties (cf. Pl. 14.8). Here is a case of five components brought together to express the unity of the Great Hero, or, Large Man (i.e. Mahāvīra), worshipped as god in this ritual. Another example occurs in the Agnicayana sacrifice. The resubstantiation of Prajāpati is the heart of the correspondence between “one” and “five”. The “One” having dissolved into his “five” bodily parts (*supra*), needs to be reconstituted into a cosmic unity. The equivalency between “one” and “five” is probed in a question relating to this reconstitution. “If he consists of one brick, then how does he come to be the five-bricked one?”, asks Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa 6.1.2.30. The answer, involving in part the equivalency between “one” (brick or course) and “five” (bricks or course of bricks) stipulates the construction of the five-layered altar in the Agnicayana.⁷⁶ (Perhaps the antecedents for the medieval śaiva āgamas which describe the emerging god with either one or five heads could go back as far as numerical symbols developed in ancient Hinduism.)⁷⁷ The earliest Ekamukha Liṅgas, I propose, represent the emergence of the fivefold creator god while concentrating on one aspect of the Creator. The Aghāpura Ekamukha Liṅga concentrates on the emergence of the Creator as Sovereign, for that is the symbolic significance of the *uṣṇīṣin* headdress⁷⁸ (Pl. 17.8). The Ekamukha Liṅga in the Mathurā relief (Pls. 17.6 & 7) emphasizes the emergence of the Creator as Yogīn, for that is the significance of the head with the ascetic’s looks etc. The exact nature of the Ekamukha in the Philadelphia Museum is not clear to me (Pl. 17.5). The distinctive *jatābhāra* hair treatment suggests that the mukha answers a verse in the Śatarudrīya litany; in TS 4.5.5d homage is given to the One whose hair is braided and knotted like a cowrie shell (i.e. *kapardin*). The snake among the braids may allude to the fearsomeness of this head.

To date, one pre-Kuṣāṇa full-length śaiva figure with multiple bodily parts is known. It is the Mūsānagar seated image from which project three other torsos. The manner in which the ancillary figures branch around the central one is an indigenous iconographic convention symbolizing “emanation” (see Chapter 19). The meaning of the seated figure is less problematic than I once thought. The iconography of the image closely coordi-

⁷³ See Chapter 12, p. 163.

⁷⁴ Bergaigne, *Religion Védique*, Tome II, p. 148; p. 151.

⁷⁵ van Buitenen, *The Pravargya*, pp. 56–57; Knipe, *Fire*, p. 17.

⁷⁶ Knipe, *Fire*, p. 15.

⁷⁷ Indeed the conceptual equivalency between “one” and “five”, is apparent in medieval Indian art, specifically in the equivalency between “ekamukha” and “pañcamukha” in śaiva iconography. See D.M. Srinivasan, “From Transcendancy to Materiality: Para Śiva, Sadāśiva and Maheśa in Indian Art”, *Artibus Asiae*, Vol. L, 1/2 1990, 128.

⁷⁸ A.K. Coomaraswamy, “Uṣṇīṣa and Chatra”, *The Poona Orientalist*, Vol. III, 1938, 1–19.

nates with a series of Kuṣāṇa images having emergence as their common motif. It is better to consider the interpretation of the Mūsānagar seated figure with the rest of the series in Chapter 19. However, it may already be noticed that two of the “mukhas” of this “caturmukha” figure are of the Mukhalinga category. The central, main figure has the *uṣṇīṣin* headdress and the head opposite (i.e. above) the main head has hair like a *yogīn* (Pl. 17.11). To anticipate findings in Chapter 19, no longer is there uncertainty whether the image relates to the *śaiva* caturmukha category or to a *śaiva vyūha* concept (for which a strong textual argument is lacking). It can now be demonstrated that the figure relates to the caturmukha category.

The interest of the Śiva Ūrdhvaretas from Rṣikeśa does not relate to the question of multiplicity, but to the connection between this Śiva and early Yakṣa images⁷⁹ (Pl. 17.10). The stance of Śiva is comparable to the *samapada* position assumed by the Deoriyā Yakṣa and the Vidiśā Yakṣa. In all three, the legs are planted firmly apart like pillars carrying the upper portion of the body. That the Rṣikeśa sculpture shares dress, mudrā and vase attributes with Yakṣa images is not distinctive of “Yakṣa” symbolism since these elements are part of a wider pan-Indic iconography. By contrast, the fact that the figure shares height with the Yakṣas is unusual since there are very few large Brahmanic images until the Gupta period. It is the size of the Śiva Ūrdhvaretas, plus the stance that link this statue, visually, to the colossal or Mahā Yakṣa statues. The overall impression is that Śiva appears in the guise of a Yakṣa. True, the Līṅga Purāṇa (Chapters 53, 55–61) describes Śiva as Yakṣa; but there is probably a clue, more contemporaneous with the statue, on what that similarity may mean. In Mahābhārata XIII.14–107, Śiva is described as being *mahākāya*, just as Yudhiṣṭhira’s Yakṣa in the same work is described as tall like a palm and big-bodied (*mahākāya*). The intention of the Rṣikeśa sculpture may be to express the act of manifesting rather than the nature of the manifested godhead. That is, the sudden glimpse of the divine apparition may be what this image of Śiva Ūrdhvaretas wishes to convey. Who would gain such a glimpse? In the Atharva Veda it is the brahman-knowers (*brahmavid-*; cf. 10.8.43) who know about *yakṣa*. In the Śuṅga age, could it be the Śiva-knowers?

A dominant theme surfaces as a result of the proposed significance of major categories of early *śaiva* art. The *śaiva* corpus seems to be oriented towards gaining knowledge (*veda*) of the god.⁸⁰ The art and its age show little concern to explore divinity’s greatness in labours or legends (i.e. *līlās*). The Vedic outlook retains sufficient force to influence artistic expression. To be sure, Vedism is being challenged by heterodoxies and theistic cults, forcing accommodating gestures to be undertaken from within Brahmanic culture. But the spirit of the past is allowed to dominate a little while longer, especially in the arts. To know the nature of creation and the creator, to know divinity and its powers, to

⁷⁹ The Śiva image was found together with a female colossus whose identification needs further study; she is conceived on the model of a Yakṣī. See W.H. Siddiqi, “Two Newly Discovered Pre-Kuṣāṇa Sculptures from Rṣikeśa (Uttar Pradesh)”, *Journal of the Indian Society of Oriental Art*, Dr. Moti Chandra Commemoration Volume, 1978, 76–80.

⁸⁰ On the distinction between early Hindu art and later Hindu art based on the concepts called “veda” and “līlā”, see Chapter 1.

know the relationship between man's environment and the cosmos, these themes occurring in the art hark back to the Vedic legacy and its emphasis on cosmogony and cosmology. Such themes can go beyond the pace and purpose of narration. As a corollary, a narrative orientation is absent in the early *śaiva* assemblage.

Absence of plastic representations of legendary episodes needs further elaboration. It is not that early literature is devoid of *śaivite* legends. Vedic literature contains a story to explain how Rudra received his names (*Kauṣītaki Brāhmaṇa* VI.1–9) and another on how Rudra punishes incestuous Prajāpati and distributes the seed (*Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* I.7.4.1–8). Already the *Taittirīya Saṃhitā* indicates that the gods barred Rudra from the sacrifice (II.6.8.2) and the *Aitareya Brāhmaṇa* (III.34) recounts how the gods deprived Rudra of his part of the offering. Another myth in the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* (I.7.3.1–7) relates why Rudra has claim to the remaining portion of the sacrificial oblation. These Vedic accounts are forerunners, no doubt, of the epic legend which tells of Śiva's exclusion from Dakṣa's sacrifice (*Mhbh.* XII.274.2–58). The epic also narrates Śiva's destruction of Tripura (*Mhbh.* VIII.24.3ff.). However, these myths do not receive plastic expression, and the overwhelming impression gained from the material evidence is that it is more concerned with the nature of divinity than divine legends. This emphasis in *śaiva* art is matched with developments in early *vaiṣṇava* art, where narrative representations are also few. The minimal use of the narrative in early Hindu art is sharply distinguished from the emphasis on the narrative in Buddhist art during its early phase. Its absence in much of early Hindu art must be considered purposeful and in response to a different religious orientation. The orientation is decidedly theological: the emphasis is on knowledge of god's nature and the translation of that knowledge into forms fit for worship. A trend, away from the narrative, seems to have continued. A recent study on medieval narrative sculpture points out that Hindu narrative sculpture was never strong in North India and that this phenomenon must be taken into account when analyzing this genre.⁸¹ The causes of a weak narrative tradition in medieval Hindu sculpture complement very well the explanations set forth here for the earlier periods.

If there seems to be a cultural restraint towards representation of forms, as the limited *śaiva* assemblage suggests, and if, in addition, there seems to be a restraint towards experimentation with forms, again as suggested by the assemblage, then there does nevertheless remain the stunning complexity of forms endowed with a mature iconographic language in the midst of, and in spite of, these restraints. The full explanation for this phenomenon is slowly emerging. Part of the answer lies in the role of religious networks to impart knowledge of ritual symbols and their meanings. The role of the ritual as stimulator of incipient iconography is too strong to be overlooked. A summation of the possible role of the Agnicayana alone is too provocative to be accidental. As regards the Pañcamukha Linga, the Agnicayana endorsed an association of fivefoldedness with the creator; it restricted "mukhas" to five; it endorsed an association between "mukhas" and "five cardinal points"; it endorsed the meaning of "mukha" as "the first element when

⁸¹ Donald M. Stadtner, "Medieval Narrative Sculpture and Three Kṛṣṇa Panels", *Ars Orientalis*, Vol. 17, 1987, 124.

more of the limbs of the body are forthcoming"; it may have fostered the conjoining of "mukhas" to a cylindrical shaft; it allied the building of the altar to honour Rudra-Śiva with a long litany, chanted upon the altar's completion and thus provided the context for hearing verses in this litany which tally with the numerous "mukhas" appearing on the earliest Pañcamukha Liṅga. As regards the relation of an Ekamukha to a Pañcamukha, the Agnicayana asserted the equivalency between the "one" and the "fivefold one". As regards the Mahā Yakṣa, the Agnicayana endorsed the concept of the Pregnant Male and it employed, as main ritual vessel, a pot charged with decorative motifs associated with female productivity; indeed it required the fabrication of "male" pots and "female" pots which in themselves may have helped to breach restraints conditioned by an aniconic outlook. It surely conditioned the audience towards acceptance of an image of the manifold creator, since the notion of manifoldness was enacted and substantiated within the drama of the Agnicayana. Prajāpati, the omniform creator god of the Agnicayana, declares that the sacrifice is his image (*pratimā*),⁸² thereby setting the stage for the eventual, discreet employment of the multiplicity convention in Hindu iconography.

⁸² See Chapter 6, p. 65.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

MULTIPLICITY AND THE MERGER TOWARDS VAIṢṆAVISM

Now Vāsudeva, Who was born from Vasudeva. He is twofold: the Human Vāsudeva, because He has a human form; and the Divine Vāsudeva, because He has a divine form.

He should cause (Him) to be made like a man with two arms, bearing a conch, of black limbs, adorned with the crown and all the ornaments: . . .

Now the Lord of gods as Vāsudeva whom he should cause to be made, as the Divine Vāsudeva, four-armed . . .

Kāśyapa's *Book of Wisdom*; parts of Chapters 84 & 85

Kāśyapa's proclamation, of c. the ninth century A.D.,¹ is potentially a balm for untangling problems arising from the multiplicity convention in Kuṣāṇa Vaiṣṇava art. This South Indian text invites classification and interpretation of Vāsudeva's images on the basis of their being either two-or four-armed. Since the majority of Vaiṣṇava images of the Kuṣāṇa period portray Vāsudeva² as mainly two- or four-armed, Kāśyapa deserves a hearing for the possible application of his wisdom to the earlier period, especially since this is not his private wisdom. Other, roughly contemporaneous, texts state much the same thing.

Vāsudeva's twofold nature is given in the *Vaikhanasāgama*, another South Indian work of the same time or a little earlier than Kāśyapa's *Book*. Mānuṣa Vāsudeva has two arms and carries the cakṛa and śaṅkha; Daivika Vāsudeva has four arms and holds the same attributes.³ The Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa,⁴ perhaps a century or more prior to the Kāśyapa's *Book of Wisdom*, exhibits similarities and variations from the Southern texts, as may be expected from a work stemming from the Northwest (i.e. Kashmir). The image

¹ The translation comes from *Kāśyapa's Book of Wisdom* (Kāśyapa-Jñanakāṇḍah) transl. and annotated by T. Goudriaan. The Hague, 1965, see p. 256. This is a Vaikhāṇasa ritual handbook. Goudriaan supplies the date of c. 800 A.D. J. Gonda (*Medieval Religious Literature in Sanskrit*, Wiesbaden, 1977, p. 146) places the text between c. 800–1000 A.D.

² See D.M. Srinivasan, "Vaiṣṇava Art", pp. 383ff.

³ See T.A.G. Rao, *Elements of Hindu Iconography* Vol. I, Pt. II; pp. 64–65. L. Renou mentions this āgama in *L'Inde Classique* I, p. 631; Gonda (*Medieval Religious Literature* p. 152, fn. 109) questions whether this work is actually Kāśyapa's *Book of Wisdom*. Marie-Thérèse de Mallmann (*Les Enseignements Iconographiques de L'Agni-Purāṇa*, Paris, 1963, p. 19, fn. 3), dates the *Vaikhanasāgama* to the 7th century, and therefore prior to the 9th century A.D., *terminus ad quem* for the redaction of the Agni Purāṇa.

⁴ Renou, *L'Inde*, I, p. 423, dates this text between the seventh and tenth century A.D.; de Mallmann *L'Agni-Purāṇa*, p. 3, states that the Agni Purāṇa's oldest section dates around the sixth century A.D., and she notes the close similarity between the iconographic sections of the Purāṇa with sections in the Viṣṇudh. Purāṇa III, and the Bṛhat Saṃhitā.

with one face and two-arms (see III.60),⁵ holds gadā and cakra. Vāsudeva's *saumya*⁶ or peaceful form has one face and four arms (see III.85.1–2). The gadā and cakra appear, personified, to the right and left of the god who holds the lotus in his right natural hand and the conch in his left natural hand (see III.85.10–13).⁷ The Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa speaks also of an image with four heads and eight arms (see III.44 & 47).⁸ In III.44.11–13, the four heads and the attributes in the eight arms are given. The heads are called Saumya, Nārasimha, Kāpila and Varāha; the attributes are Bāṇa (reed-shaft), Akṣa (wheel), Musala (pestle), Carma (hide), Cīra (? piece of cloth; a necklace), Dhanu (bow), Indra (?), Cāpa (arc), and Iṣu (arrow). In III.47.10–18, the names of the heads are the names of four Vṛṣṇi Vīras, with Vāsudeva's name preceding that of Saṃkarṣaṇa, which is followed by the names of Pradyumna and Aniruddha. The attributes in this passage are Sūrya (sun), Rātripa (moon), Musala (pestle), Lāṅgala (plough), Cāpa (arc), Bāṇa (reed-shaft), Carma (hide), and Khaḍga (sword). Because of the sequence of the names, it is clear that the four headed, eight-armed image portrays the Caturvyūha form, and, when these names are coordinated with the appellations given in III.44 (*supra*), equivalencies are established that are concretized as early as the Bhīṭā Caturvyūha.⁹ The older part of the Agni Purāṇa, belonging to the same general period as the Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa, and therefore very loosely situated in the periods of the Southern texts,¹⁰ also knows three categories for depicting Vāsudeva. The god may be depicted, states Chapter 63, with two arms which are then seen in *abhaya* (right hand) and holding the mace (left hand). When Vāsudeva has four arms, the wheel is in his upper left hand, the conch in his lower left, possibly the mace in his upper right; or, going clockwise from lower right, he may hold the lotus, wheel, conch and mace.¹¹ The four-headed Caturvyūha form is also known.¹²

These texts agree on the following points: 1) human Vāsudeva can be represented with two arms and one head; 2) the image of Vāsudeva as the peaceful Lord can be represented with four arms and one head; 3) Vāsudeva can be represented in a cosmic aspect, such as the Caturvyūha; such an image intensifies the multiplication by presenting several multiple bodily forms or parts. This rather straightforward prescription can now be put to work for the problem at hand, namely an analysis of the Vaiṣṇava assemblage dating to the Kuṣāṇa period, with particular attention to imagery having the multiplicity convention.

There are a few images of Vāsudeva with two arms. The best example is on a post-Kuṣāṇa relief. This is the relief from Kondamotu, Andhra Pradesh dated to the early fourth century (Pl. 18.1). Only recently has it been correctly interpreted by Dr. Herbert Härtel. Vāsudeva is one of the five Vṛṣṇi Vīras represented. "The five persons are:

⁵ Priyabala Shah, ed. *Viṣṇudharmottara-Purāṇa*, Third Khaṇḍa, Vol. I, Baroda, 1958; p. 183.

⁶ On this term see Chapter XI.B, p. 145.

⁷ P. Shah, *ViDh P*, I, p. 222–223.

⁸ In III.85.43 the *ViDh P* calls the four-headed form "Vaikuṇṭha".

⁹ See Chapters 15, pp. 209–210, and 16, p. 218. These passages in the *ViDh P* imply that Saṃkarṣaṇa can be portrayed as Nārasimha and Aniruddha as Varāha.

¹⁰ See fns. 3 & 4.

¹¹ See de Mallmann, *L'Agni-Purāṇa*, pp. 16–17, fn. 9 on p. 17.

¹² See de Mallmann, *L'Agni-Purāṇa*, pp. 16, 19ff.

Samkarṣaṇa with club and lion-plough, Vāsudeva with vyāvṛtta-mudrā and conch-shell, Pradyumna with a bundle of arrows or quiver and bow, Sāmba with some indistinct attribute and Aniruddha with sword and shield".¹³ Between Vāsudeva and Pradyumna appears a four-armed, seated form of Nārasimha; he has the Śrīvatsa emblem on the chest and holds cakṛa and gadā in his extra arms, which are human. Nārasimha's central position, his attributes and emblem, and especially his multiple arms show that in this relief he is more important than the Vṛṣṇi Vīras. His four arms and their two arms remind of the distinction between Mānuṣa and Daivika forms in several of the texts cited above. On the basis of the portrayal of Vāsudeva in the Kondamotu relief, another fourth century image from Andhra Pradesh may be identified as the Vṛṣṇi Vīra Vāsudeva (Pl. 18.2). In this broken limestone sculpture from Yellesvaram, all that remains is the headless standing body of a two-armed god. His left hand holds the conch at the hip, exactly as Vāsudeva does in the Kondamotu relief. The right arm holds the mace. The god wears a dhoti tied in front with a looped sash.¹⁴ These examples¹⁵ of two-armed Vṛṣṇi Heroes recall that the pre-Kuṣāṇa samples from the Northwest (Pls. 16.6–8) are two-armed, as are those of the three Morā torsos who probably also represent the Vṛṣṇi Vīras (Pls. 16.1; 4a & b). A reference in the Vāyu Purāṇa provides the reason why deified Vṛṣṇi Vīras are with two arms; essentially, it confirms the directive gleaned from the iconographic passages. Naming the five *vaṃśāvīras* (i.e. Heroes of the [Vṛṣṇi] clan) the text notes that they are gods of human origin (*manuṣyaṇṛkṛtīdevān*, Vāyu Purāṇa 97.1–2). Obviously, the apotheosis of actual Kṣatriya Heroes underlies this particular representation, not only of Vāsudeva, but of the Vṛṣṇi Vīras in general. It is therefore not altogether surprising to find Samkarṣaṇa/Balarāma and Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa, two-armed and on either side of the Jain Tīrthaṅkara Neminātha on a Mathurā relief from the Late Kuṣāṇa period (Pl. 18.3).¹⁶ The brothers fold their hands in *añjali* mudrā. Since Samkarṣaṇa/Balarāma is to the right of the Tīrthaṅkara and Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa is to his left, it is clear that the Vṛṣṇi kinship relationship governs their disposition. Unclear is why a serpent surrounds the human form of the god Samkarṣaṇa/Balarāma in this and other similar Jain reliefs.

There is a two-armed figure on Kuṣāṇa reliefs that is usually identified as Kṛṣṇa fighting Keśin (i.e. the Keśīvadha līlā). Three Mathurā examples are known. One was found in Pakistan;¹⁷ one is in the Mathura Museum (No. 58.4476),¹⁸ and one came into the Metropolitan Museum of Art from the Eilenberg Collection (Pl. 18.4). All those that are intact show a lively combat scene and capture the moment when the combatant pushes

¹³ H. Härtel, "Early Vāsudeva Worship", p. 576, fn. 9.

¹⁴ This sculpture was first noticed by M.L. Nigam. "Early Iconography of Viṣṇu in Andhra Region", *Vaiṣṇavism*, ed., R. Parimoo (see citation in fn. 6, Chap. 13), p. 180.

¹⁵ Another two-armed sculpture, of the fourth century A.D., from Mandhal, could possibly represent Vāsudeva. A distinguishing feature is the Vaiṣṇava crown, but it is really not enough to make an identification.

¹⁶ See D.M. Srinivasan, "Vaiṣṇava Art", p. 386 for a full discussion of this type. Four examples are known to me (State Museum, Lucknow Nos. B 15; J 117; J 60; Mathura Museum No. 34.2488).

¹⁷ See J.E. van Lohuizen-de Leeuw, "Gandhara and Mathurā: Their Cultural Relationship", *Aspect of Indian Art*, ed. P. Pal, Leiden 1972, pp. 27–43, Pl. XI (top).

¹⁸ See N.P. Joshi, *Mathurā Sculptures*, Mathura, 1966, pp. 68–69; Fig. 64.

his elbow into the mouth of the rampant horse. In each case, the scene is depicted on a weight stone; such stones should have been used for athletic exercises and possibly athletic competitions.¹⁹ A gray schist weight stone, probably made in Gandhara according to a format laid down in Mathurā, depicts the same subject in the same fashion on its outer face (Pl. 18.5). If indeed the Keśīvadha līlā is represented, the episode is tied to Mathurā. The evil Kaṁsa, king of Mathurā, sends the demonic horse Keśin to destroy Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa. The plan does not succeed since it is the god who subdues the demon. But I am not quite sure that this līlā is represented. For one, it would be the only līlā represented in Kuṣāṇa art, at a time when Hindu narratives in general are not exploited as themes in art.²⁰ Second, the image of the horse evokes the spirited horse on the abacus of the Aśokan Lion capital in the Archaeological Museum, Sarnath, causing further reflection on the intended subject. Thirdly it seems altogether appropriate to carve an event portraying a scene of human heroic combat on a weight stone. Mathurā's wrestlers were well known in antiquity.²¹ It seems natural for the town's ateliers to devise a combat scene on weight stones to be used by athletes. Actually the inner face of the Gandharan weight stone mentioned above (Pl. 18.6), shows a wrestling match. Wrestlers and onlookers are of equal height, dress, physique etc., leaving me unconvinced by S.J. Czuma's observation that one of the wrestlers here is Kṛṣṇa.²² The real question raised in identifying the combat scene as the Keśīvadha līlā is why this līlā would be the first līlā chosen for representation. Among līlās, this episode is an odd first choice. It is much easier to stipulate that later, when the demand for representations of this līlā appeared in earnest,²³ a combat scene devised earlier for weight stones served as the model. If this stipulation is possible, then the two-armed personage in the combat scene is not Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa.

Another two-armed icon from Mathurā appears to break all the rules. It is a rare example of a Kuṣāṇa Brahmanic colossus. It represents a two-armed god, not a deified human, and it is a unique representation (see Pl. 18.7).²⁴ Being unique, several identifications have been proposed. Shri R.C. Sharma considers the image to be a rare aspect of Śiva "on the basis of matted hair, rosary, yajñopavīta, beard, deer skin etc. . . ."²⁵

¹⁹ The contemporary competition in Alan R. Beals, *Gopalpur, A South Indian Village*, New York, 1962. Photo opposite page 1, looks similar.

²⁰ On this subject see Chapter 17. For Kṛṣṇa-līlās in pre-Gupta art, see D.M. Srinivasan, "Vaiṣṇava Art", pp. 387-388.

²¹ See details in the Mūla-Sarvāstivāda Vinaya, *Cīvaravastu* Section, etc., described by P.S. Jaini, "Political and Cultural Data in References to Mathurā in the Buddhist Literature", in *Mathurā* p. 219.

²² S.J. Czuma, *Kushan Sculpture Images from Early India*, Cleveland 1985, pp. 163-164.

²³ A survey is in D.M. Srinivasan, "Early Kṛṣṇa Icons", pp. 127-128. For Gupta and later depictions see Krishna Deva, "Are there Regional Variations in the Plastic Representations of Kṛṣṇalīlā?", in *Vaiṣṇavism*, pp. 395-400. Donald M. Stadtner, "The Tradition of Kṛṣṇa Pillars in North India", *Archives of Asian Art*, Vol. XL, 1987, 56-68. Note, especially, that Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa is four-armed on the Gaḍhwā relief and the Bādāmi relief, both of which refer to wrestling contexts.

²⁴ Doris Meth Srinivasan, "God as Brahmanical Ascetic: A Colossal Kuṣāṇa Icon of the Mathurā School", *Journal of the Indian Society of Oriental Art* N.S. Vol. X: 1978-79, 1-16.

²⁵ R.C. Sharma, "A Rare Śaivite Image from Nadan", *Bulletin of Museums & Archaeology in U.P.* Vols. 15 & 16, June-Dec. 1975, 19.

However, on *this* basis, the image is more likely to be a Kuṣāṇa representation of Agni than a Kuṣāṇa representation of Śiva.²⁶ Dr. U.P. Shah served notice in a 1987 publication that he would publish a paper showing that the statue represents a great ancient ṛṣi “like Badaryana Kṛṣṇa Dvaipayana Vyasa, or Visvamitra, or Agastya or Valmiki and so on”;²⁷ sadly, due to his demise, we are deprived of his analyses. The statue does, of course, represent a Brahmanic ascetic.²⁸ But one feature mitigates Shah’s suggestion that a great ṛṣi is represented. That feature is size. Originally the statue was over 8' tall. Given its colossal size and the rarity of Brahmanic colossi in the Kuṣāṇa period, the figure cannot be of a mortal, not even a great ṛṣi; it must be of a divinity of considerable power and religious following. There is only one divinity modeled on the Brahmanic ascetic who is sufficiently popular and awesome at this time to attain cultic status. That divinity is Bhagavān Nārāyaṇa. The fact that he is a two-armed god in the Kuṣāṇa sculpture corresponds to his two-armed representation in an early Gupta terracotta from Ahicchatra in the Los Angeles County Museum of Art.²⁹ It does not correspond with the series of textual prescriptions opening this chapter. Those prescriptions, of course, apply to Vāsudeva, and, during the periods of our concern, the final merger of Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa, Nārāyaṇa and Vedic Viṣṇu into the great Hindu sect of Vaiṣṇavism had not yet been fully achieved. Coins, art, epigraphy and some literary indications imply that the merger became rooted in the late Kuṣāṇa/early Gupta periods although earlier evidence, working towards merger existed and probably later archaisms also existed.³⁰ The fluid iconography evident during the period of merging is demonstrated by the Ahicchatra terracotta versus the sculptured panel from Deogarh also depicting Nārāyaṇa together with Nara. In the Deogarh relief, which is later than the Ahicchatra terracotta, Nārāyaṇa is four-armed. Nārāyaṇa is also four-armed in the medieval representation from Badrī (U.P.), the famous pilgrimage site in the Himalayas. These four-armed images of Nārāyaṇa are in accordance with the post-Gupta Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa which states that in images of Nara-Nārāyaṇa, the latter should have four-arms (see III.76.2). When I first published the unique Kuṣāṇa colossus, I provided Vedic and epic passages to furnish the rationale for the portrayal of Nārāyaṇa as the colossus. I can now demonstrate that this feature, indeed, marks Nārāyaṇa. The image of an 8' tall, two-armed being (Pls. 18.7 & 8) is a lithic (and literal) translation of Mahāpuruṣa (i.e. the Large Person or Being); this epithet is applied to Nārāyaṇa in the Mahābhārata.³¹ In the “Mahā-Nārāyaṇa Upaniṣad” (of c. the Christian era),³² the “mahā” quality obviously defines that deity. In that same

²⁶ See D.M. Srinivasan, “Brahmanical Ascetic”, 3–6. But of course, the image cannot be an Agni since there are no flames about his head.

²⁷ U.P. Shah, “The Badrī-Nārāyaṇa Image” in *Vaiṣṇavism*, p. 306.

²⁸ D.M. Srinivasan, “Brahmanic Ascetic”, 9ff.; cf. D.M. Srinivasan, “Vaiṣṇava Art”, p. 389.

²⁹ See Fig. 21 and p. 10 in D.M. Srinivasan, “Brahmanic Ascetic”.

³⁰ The point is again taken up at the conclusion of this chapter. Cf. H. Härtel, “Vāsudeva Worship”, pp. 586–587; D.M. Srinivasan, “Caturvyūha and Variant Forms”, 49–51; U.P. Shah, “Badrī-Nārāyaṇa”, p. 299. R.G. Bhandarkar, *Vaiṣṇavism Śaivism and Minor Religious Systems*, Reprint. Varanasi 1965. See especially Chapters VII & VIII.

³¹ Mhbh. XII.325.4, No. 8.

³² Date is discussed in Chapter X, pp. 120–121.

Upaniṣad, Nārāyaṇa's name is used interchangeably with the name "Puruṣa",³³ making it clear that this god inherits the qualities of the Vedic Cosmic Giant, Puruṣa. "Mahā Nārāyaṇa", of the Upaniṣad, is a life-giving great god whose nature is *viśvarūpa*, or omniform. The fame of Bhagavān Nārāyaṇa as Mahāpuruṣa was so great in antiquity and so well established that it influenced thinking about the nature of the Buddha. In the Lalitavistara, the Buddha is repeatedly described as *nārāyaṇasthāmavān* (having the strength of Nārāyaṇa); he is invincible like Nārāyaṇa (*nārāyaṇa iva durdharaśaḥ*). Sometimes he is called "Nārāyaṇa" and sometimes the same epithet "Mahāpuruṣa" is applied to him in this text.³⁴ The Daśasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā, another ancient text, but probably younger than the Lalitavistara, notes that one of the eighty secondary marks of the Buddha is to have a body firm like that of Nārāyaṇa (*Nārāyaṇavat susaṃhatagātrās*).³⁵ The impact of this influence caused the Mathurā artisans to create the first standing and seated figures of the Buddha as the Mahāpuruṣa. Awareness that the Mahāpuruṣa ideal underlies Mathurā's earliest Buddha images is a recent scholarly advancement.³⁶ It is the linchpin affirming the sagacity of an argument proposed by Senart over a hundred years ago³⁷ and supported by Konow,³⁸ namely that the Buddhist conception of the Mahāpuruṣa is influenced by notions connected with Viṣṇu-Nārāyaṇa. "... le Mahāpuruṣa buddhique, Buddha ou Cakravartin est bien essentiellement le Puruṣa Nārāyaṇa de la mythologie et du mysticisme".

Mathurā's Brahmanic colossus validates this point. Just as the *lakṣaṇas* of a Mahāpuruṣa can be isolated in the early Buddha images, so can they be detected in the Nārāyaṇa image. As such, it must be considered as intentional that in the Mathurā sculpture, Lord Nārāyaṇa has an *ūṣmā* (Pl. 18.9), hair that is twisted around the head like a turban (*uṣṇīṣa*; see Pl. 18.8), a samapāda posture, broad shoulders, no emphasis on the sex parts and a deep and well-rounded navel; these are the characteristics proclaiming his Mahāpuruṣa nature.³⁹ As such, I again submit that the concert of features – colossal height, iconography applicable only to a Brahmanic ascetic, and the presence of characteristics marking a Mahāpuruṣa – converge to identify this unique piece as Bhagavān Nārāyaṇa.

By far, the most popular Vaiṣṇava image of the Kuṣāṇa period has multiple arms. This is the image of Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa with one face and four arms. The gadā and cakra are in his upper right and left hands, respectively. The natural right is in *abhaya* mudrā and the natural left may hold either a flask (*kamaṇḍalu*; see Pl. 18.10), or a conch (*śaṅkha*). The flask is indicative of an earlier Kuṣāṇa dating than the conch. Later Kuṣāṇa representations

³³ See Chapter X, pp. 115–116.

³⁴ See E. Senart, *Essai sur la Légende du Buddha*, Paris, 1882, p. 123. S. Jaiswal, *The Origin and Development of Vaiṣṇavism*, Delhi, 1967, p. 131.

³⁵ Sten Konow, *The Two First Chapters of the Daśasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā*, Oslo, 1941, p. 59.

³⁶ Herbert Härtel, "The Concept of the Kapardin Buddha Type of Mathura". *South Asian Archaeology 1983*, eds. Janine Schotsmans and Maurizio Taddei, Naples 1985, pp. 653–678.

³⁷ E. Senart, *Essai sur la Légende du Buddha*, Paris, 1882.

³⁸ Sten Konow, *The two first chapters of the Daśasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā*, pp. 59, 73–74, 80–81.

³⁹ Cf. Alex Wayman, "Contributions Regarding the Thirty-Two Characteristics of the Great Person", in Liebenthal Festschrift; *Sino-Indian Studies*, May 1957, Vol. V. Pts. 3 & 4, pp. 243–260. Stella Kramrisch, "Emblems of the Universal Being", reprinted in *Exploring India's Sacred Art* ed. B.S. Miller, Philadelphia, 1983, pp. 130–140. E. Senart, *Légende du Buddha*, pp. 110–113.

with the conch (Pl. 18.11) conform to the image described in the *Bṛhat Saṃhitā* (LVII.34), which is dated to the last quarter of the fifth and first half of the sixth century A.D.⁴⁰ In calling this an image of Viṣṇu, the text indirectly informs us of the probable completion of the merger whereby separate cult deities came to be subsumed under Viṣṇu. For the *Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa* (III.85), Viṣṇu as Vāsudeva holds attributes like those in the *Bṛhat Saṃhitā*, except that the lotus is held in the natural right hand. The lotus, like the flask, has chronological implications; it does not appear as an attribute until the post-Gupta period. The more stable attributes, gadā and cakra, correlate with the passage in the *Bhagavad Gītā* (XI.46), and the general appearance of the four-armed Kuṣāṇa image of Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa also agrees with this passage.⁴¹ This four-armed image of Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa is again found in the context of the Mathurā kinship reliefs dated to the Kuṣāṇa period. Actually, it is on the basis of these kinship reliefs that the four-armed figure with the gadā and cakra can be securely identified as Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa (Pl. 16.5). The identification rests on genealogical considerations which govern the iconography of the kinship reliefs. Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa is portrayed as the younger brother of Saṃkarṣaṇa/Balarāma since he is always placed to the left of the older brother (and older sister, Ekānamśā). Sometimes he is also rendered smaller than his older brother. To date six, possibly seven,⁴² Kuṣāṇa kinship groups are known. The Vṛṣṇi brothers in the Kuṣāṇa reliefs coming from Mathurā, or in Kuṣāṇa kinship statues coming from Gayā District are two-armed or four-armed, but in the earlier representations from the Northwest (Pls. 16.6–8; and probably from Morā, Pl. 16.1) and from Andhra Pradesh (Pls. 18.1 & 2), the Vṛṣṇi Vīras are two-armed. The Jain reliefs from Mathurā dating to the Kuṣāṇa period indicate that options exist. Saṃkarṣaṇa/Balarāma and Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa can be represented either with two or four arms in the same Jaina context.⁴³ The brothers appear to the right and left, respectively, of Tīrthaṅkara Neminātha; they can have two hands, poised in *añjali* mudrā which bespeaks of secondary status (Pl. 18.3), or, they can have four arms although still cast as ancillary deities (Pl. 1.1). Why this option should

⁴⁰ Ajay Mitra Shastri, *India as Seen in The Bṛhatsaṃhitā of Varāhamihira*, Delhi, 1969, pp. 16 & 133. *Abhaya* mudrā is herein referred to as the *sāntida* pose (see p. 133, fn. 2).

⁴¹ These attributes also appear on the unique Nicolo Seal first described by Cunningham, subsequently by J.N. Banerjea (*The Development of Hindu Iconography*, 3rd ed., New Delhi, 1974, pp. 124–125; and 402). Most recently the seal and its inscription have been analyzed by R. Göbl who dates it to the third century A.D. See Robert Göbl, *Dokumente zur Geschichte der Iranischen Hunnen in Baktrien und Indien*, Band I, Wiesbaden 1967, pp. 226–227. The seal depicts a worshipper in Kuṣāṇa (Göbl) trousers standing in front of a four-armed god. The god holds in his lowered natural hands a ribbed gadā (right) and a cakra (left). The extra raised hands hold a ring and the conch in the right and left hands respectively. The comparison between these and other iconographic traits and those of the late Gandharan four-armed Viṣṇu from Taxila who also holds gadā and cakra in the lowered right and left hands, respectively (Pl. XXI in Banerjea, *Development*), have already been cited by Banerjea, pp. 401–402.

⁴² They are: Mathura Museum Nos. 67.529; U 45; 15.912; one in a Pakistani Collection that may be from Mathurā; a series of three separate figures from Gayā District; the Mathurā relief in the Ellsworth Collection (Pl. 16.5); possibly a fragment in the Mathura Museum (No. 39.2856), which depicts the first member, Saṃkarṣaṇa/Balarāma. Therefore the fragment could have formed part of a Jaina triad, but the contours of the fragment make this unlikely.

⁴³ See fn. 16 for the references to the two-armed examples. The four-armed examples are: State Museum, Lucknow Nos. S 758; J 47; J 89; 12; Mathura Museum No. 2502. Analysis is in D.M. Srinivasan, "Vaiṣṇava Art", pp. 386–387.

exist can only be conjectured. On some level the choice ought to distinguish the human form of god from the divine form, as the later texts and the Kondamotu relief (Pl. 18.1) indicate.

Four-armed Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa, the *mānuṣa rūpa* Arjuna wants to see, is the humane form or aspect of the divine god.⁴⁴ This is the *rūpa* a bhakta wishes to behold. In this form, god appears wearing the regal crested turban and holding gadā and cakra in two of his four hands.

Four-armed Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa represents God manifested as Mahā Vīra. There are, to date, thirty-five representations, mainly from Mathurā and mainly from the Kuṣāṇa period.⁴⁵ No other Vaiṣṇava deity has that many representations during this time. The gadā and cakra bespeak of the warrior's strength and power, as does the conch, used for signalling in battle. No halo surrounds him. The signs of his heroic nature dominate over *lakṣaṇas* he may have of a Cakravartin or a Mahāpuruṣa.⁴⁶ Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa stands erect, crowned, ornamented. He exemplifies the elevation of the great hero to the level of god. Only his four arms predicate an especial nature.

"Four-arms" signify a humane god who can produce benefits for humanity by means of his supernatural actions within the phenomenal world.⁴⁷ This significance is derived from passages in the Bhagavad Gītā (XI.46–51), plus the symbolism adhering in "arms" and the number "four". Arms are the limbs of action. Doubling the normal number of arms, doubles the capacity for action. The resultant significance of the multiple arms is "a capacity for supranormal action". The language of "four" situates the supranormal action in this world. "Four" is a worldly number. It connotes spatial completeness on the horizontal plane. Being a number identified with the region inhabited by man, "four" is also suggestive of "creativity, productivity"; in association with "multiple arms", "four" connotes "supranormal actions promoting the welfare of human life on earth". (In this context, "four" does not refer to another number, as for example, the four heads of Śiva actually refer to the five heads of Śiva.)

In addition to these specific meanings associated with the ideograph "four-arms", there

⁴⁴ On *mānuṣa rūpa*, see Chapter XI.B. In the Kāśyapa Jñānakāṇḍa, cited at the outset, *mānuṣa* – signifies "human" and not "humane"; both meanings are possible. Perhaps when this term is contrasted with *daivika* ("divine"), it assumes the meaning "human".

⁴⁵ This number represents the combined number of single representations and the god's representations in a group with other gods. For a discussion of most of them, including accession nos. see my "Vaiṣṇava Art". In addition, there is the Berlin four-armed Vāsudeva (Pl. X a in H. Härtel, "Early Vāsudeva Worship"); the Sherman E. Lee four-armed Vāsudeva (Fig. 59 in Czuma, *Kushan Sculpture*); the Ashmolean Vāsudeva (Fig. 14 in J.C. Harle and Andrew Topsfield, *Indian Art in the Ashmolean Museum*, Oxford, 1987) and the Ellsworth Vāsudeva in the kinship triad (*supra* fn. 42). The three stone plaques from Amreli (mentioned in fn. 62 of my "Vaiṣṇava Art") also show the four-armed god. Not included in the count is a gold stater which has recently come to light. The obverse shows King Vāsudeva and the reverse has a four-armed divinity identified by the inscription as Vāsudeva. The coin has been published in *History of the Coins of the Silk Road*, ed. K. Tanabe, Tokyo 1992 (No. 197). The coin's several unique and unusual features make it necessary, for the present, to use the coin with caution. Regarding the reverse, for example, it is unique and unusual for a Vaiṣṇava deity to have an *uṣṇīṣa*, to hold the vajra (seen in the upper right) and to hold a club (seen in the lower right); most of all, it is unique for the god Vāsudeva to be depicted on a coin of King Vāsudeva.

⁴⁶ The two exceptions are appearance of the *ūṛṇa* on Mathura Museum Nos. 392–5 and 34.2487.

⁴⁷ What follows is a summary of interpretations for "arms" and "four" contained in Chapter 11.B, pp. 146–147; Chapter 12, pp. 166–168. Cf. Chapter 19, p. 278 for these symbols in a *śaiva* context.

is the meaning (here and throughout where the multiplicity convention occurs), conveyed by the presence of the convention itself. The convention announces that the manifested divinity has unfolded from a cosmic divinity whose ultimate power is creation. The message conveyed by the image of the four-armed Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa (e.g. Pls. 18.10 & 11) is that the cosmic god has taken on a form of a humane god who offers to make the world a safe and beneficial place for the man who is his devotee.

This message adheres in the *avatāra* images as well. An *avatāra* is a visible incarnation of the divine descended upon earth in order to save both the world and mankind from the crushing effects of too much unrighteousness, or *adharma*. The *avatāra* images of Hayagrīva (Pl. 18.12) and Varāha (Pl. 18.13) from Mathurā, and the Nārasimha from Kondamotu (Pl. 18.1) all have four arms.⁴⁸ It is evident that the mission of an *avatāra* and the message encoded into his four-arms overlap perfectly.

I do not believe that this message, in its basic outline, changes with the changes in style and iconography in later Vaiṣṇava imagery. Later the arms may extend below the hips, the lotus may become an additional attribute, the gadā and cakra may become personified.⁴⁹ These changes and developments, occurring in the early Gupta period, on images considered as Viṣṇu will add richness and subtleties to the basic meaning of “four-arms”, without radically altering the basic meaning.

Two sorts of eight-armed Viṣṇu images are mentioned in Chapter 49 of the Agni Purāṇa, and, indeed, two types may be distinguished in the early art. The first describes the god on Tārkaṣa, that is Garuḍa. The attributes held in the eight hands are, going from top downward: a sword, the mace and an arrow on the right, while the natural right hand makes the *varada* gesture. On the left, again proceeding from top to bottom are mentioned: the bow, the shield, the wheel and the conch.⁵⁰ The Bṛhat Saṃhitā (LVII.33), describes nearly the same form but eliminates Garuḍa and substitutes the *abhaya* mudrā for *varada*.⁵¹ This form would presumably be a standing eight-armed image. The second type mentioned in Chapter 49, is called “Trailokyamohana”, an allusion to the god overwhelming the demons in the three worlds. He is again on Garuḍa, but the attributes and their distributions in the hands varies somewhat from the preceding one.⁵²

Bādāmi is an early site where two different eight-armed Viṣṇus are intact on either end of the platform fronting Cave III.⁵³ There is little difference in the attributes held in the eight hands of each image; the major difference is in the posture. On the Eastern wall, Viṣṇu stands *samapāda*; it is, of courses, an hieratic pose with no bends in the body. On the Western wall, Viṣṇu raises his left leg almost to the level of his shoulders; face and left hands follow the outward sweep of the leg. The relief on the Western end represents Viṣṇu Trivikrama at the dramatic moment when the god accomplishes his three

⁴⁸ Descriptions of the Hayagrīva and Varāha images are in my “Vaiṣṇava Art”, p. 387.

⁴⁹ H. Härtel, “Early Vāsudeva Worship”, pp. 586–587 and cf. Pls. A a & b. The changes by no means obliterated the earlier pose. See J.G. Williams, *The Art of Gupta India*, Princeton, 1982, Figs. 54; 125; 222.

⁵⁰ de Mallmann, *L'Agni-Purāṇa*, p. 40; fn. 10 provides the text.

⁵¹ A.M. Shastri, *Bṛhatsaṃhitā*, p. 133 and p. 132, fn. 6 for the text.

⁵² de Mallmann, *L'Agni-Purāṇa*, p. 41, text in fn. 7.

⁵³ The ensuing details are based on Doris Meth Srinivasan, “A Unique Mathurā Eight-Armed Viṣṇu of the 4th Century A.D.”, *Oriental Art*, Winter 1988/1989, Vol. 34.4, 276–281.

strides and conquers the demons by ousting them from the three regions of the world. Cave III, dating to the last quarter of the sixth century A.D., instructs that distinction in posture indicates a typological distinction. This instruction aids the analysis of earlier, fragmented vaiṣṇava images.

Earlier images include both the eight-armed hieratic form and the eight-armed narrative form of Viṣṇu. A Mathurā relief from the Kuṣāṇa period can be identified as Trivikrama (Pl. 18.14). The eight-armed god raises his left leg to the level of the navel; this is one of the later authorized levels for the left leg of Trivikrama (see below). Only the four arms on the right side remain in the small fragment. The natural right arm is bent and the hand on the nude chest holds an unidentified round object. The other three arms are raised, and, in descending order, hold a rock, a sword and arrows. An excellent example of the hieratic type comes also from Mathurā and dates to the fourth century A.D. (Pl. 18.15). Enough of the right side of this sandstone relief remains to recognize the *samapāda* pose and the attributes in the raised three extra arms; they are the same as in the Kuṣāṇa Trivikrama relief.⁵⁴ Even the natural right arm gestures in a manner nearly identical to the Kuṣāṇa Trivikrama. Apparently already in pre-Gupta times, the posture, more than the attributes or hand gestures, defines the type. There exist two other small eight-armed representations dating to the Kuṣāṇa period.⁵⁵ One is a relief from Mathurā (Mathura Museum No. 1010) and the other comes from Kauśāmbī (State Museum, Lucknow No. 49.247). Both are fragments preserving mainly the head and the four arms on the right, together with their attributes. Again, the attributes in descending order are: the rock, the sword and arrows. Clearly these fragments show that there is a format for early eight-armed Vaiṣṇava images.⁵⁶ Not enough remains to determine whether these two portray the hieratic or the narrative type.

None of these early images, not even those from Bādāmi Cave III, corroborate either of the two forms described in the Agni Purāṇa. However, they may reflect something of the spirit if not the letter behind that text's distinctions. The hieratic image has some attributes on the right in common with the first type mentioned in Chapter 49 of the Agni Purāṇa (vss. 16–17); the Trivikrama image seems to anticipate the form called Trailokyamohana in chapter 49 (vs. 19).

Enough has been said on the symbolism of "arms" so that the symbolism of "eight" and a general meaning for "eight arms" may straightaway be attempted. "Eight", it has been shown,⁵⁷ is an auspicious number which can be produced in two ways. One way is

⁵⁴ There is no round object held to the chest of the 4th century image.

⁵⁵ There should also have existed a wooden eight-armed Viṣṇu at Nagarjunakonda. An inscription there, dated to the end of the third century A.D., records the consecration of a wooden image of Aṣṭabhujaśvāmin, who is likely to be Viṣṇu. See *Indian Archaeology – A Review*, 1958–1959, p. 8. The inscription has been read by D.C. Sircar who states that it is the earliest reference to an eight-armed form of Viṣṇu and the form is probably made in Udumbara wood (*Epigraphia Indica* XXXIV, 199–200); also in his *Select Inscriptions* Vol. I, Calcutta, 1965, pp. 525–526.

⁵⁶ I can no longer agree with N.P. Joshi (*Catalogue of Brahmanical Sculptures in The State Museum, Lucknow*, Lucknow, 1972, pp. 14–15; 79–80; Pl. 1) that the relief, No. J 610 in that Museum is a Trivikrama (as I tentatively concurred in my "Vaiṣṇava Art", p. 387; Pl. 36, VIII.A). The main figure has two arms and displays none of the features of the Kuṣāṇa Trivikrama identified above.

⁵⁷ See Chapters 11, pp. 142–143, 152–155; 12, pp. 168–171; 19, pp. 279–281.

to double “four”, the terrestrial number. This derivation for “eight” gives the general meaning “surpassing the terrestrial”. Another way to derive “eight” is to add “one” to “seven” where “seven” represents an entity or sphere consisting of seven parts. Here the “one” represents “the whole” entity or sphere consisting of seven parts. In this derivation, distinctive to Indian numerical symbolism, “eight” comes to mean the completeness of whatever notion the entity or sphere of seven parts signifies. “Arms”, as noted above, are the limbs of action. To begin with, “eight-arms” bode luck and auspiciousness. They can denote action beyond the phenomenal sphere in which case the action is raised to the cosmic plane. “Eight-arms” can equally connote action that perfects and completes a seven-segmented entity or sphere. How, it may now be asked, do these basic meanings relate to the eight-armed Viṣṇu images described above?

The hieratic form, best seen in its early version in the fourth century A.D. Mathurā statue (Pl. 18.15), depicts god as Primordial Matter. The concept is understood in a proto-Sāṃkhyan sense; here Primordial Matter is unevolved Materiality which is endowed with the potential for evolution. The concept is found in the Bhagavad Gītā (VII.4–5).⁵⁸ Śrī Bhagavān speaks of his lower nature which exists in addition to his higher nature. His lower nature is an eightfold (*aṣṭadhā*) material nature (*prakṛti*). It is eightfold in that it comprises the eight productive material principles in their unevolved state. The enumeration of these eight principles in the Gītā indicates that god as Aṣṭadhā Prakṛti stems from a proto-Sāṃkhyan context. God as Primordial Matter, or, Eightfold Materiality (Aṣṭadhā Prakṛti) is equated with the life-causing principles upon which depend the creation of the world. The body of god is the eight evolutes needed for cosmic creation. Thus another way to understand god as Primordial Matter is to say that god is the latent empirical universe. God’s posture in samapāda expresses latency; it is a posture wherein no energy escapes. Energy is kept in balance, equipoised. This balanced posture holds the promise for potential action which is expressed by the eight arms. The multiple arms signal the power to convert potentiality into actuality. Actuality is the creation of the cosmos through the evolution of the eight productive principles. The attributes held in the multiple hands ought to support and expand upon this meaning. However, the aforementioned texts contain no hint as to the symbolic value of the rock, the sword and arrows, therefore no conjectures are possible. Even for an understanding of the earliest complete Aṣṭadhā Prakṛti representation, on the Eastern end of the platform of Cave III Bādāmi, there are no textual guidelines for the symbolism of the attributes. For the present, the main avenues open for an interpretation are the exposition in the Gītā and its general proto-Sāṃkhyan position, together with the language of “eight” and the symbolism of “arms”. As such, the eight-armed hieratic form of god⁵⁹ communicates potency of the highest order. God as Primordial Matter, or, Eightfold Materiality embodies the sub-

⁵⁸ Chapter 11, p. 141.

⁵⁹ There is no scientific way to determine whether the image should be called Viṣṇu as Aṣṭadhā Prakṛti or Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa as Aṣṭadhā Prakṛti. On the one hand, the Gītā’s description of Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa is the main guide. On the other hand, the image is of the 4th century A.D. Whether or not the merger of the Bhāgavata god within Vaiṣṇavism had been sufficiently solidified so that this image was worshipped as Viṣṇu, cannot be stated.

stance of the universe and the force to create it. God surpasses the terrestrial, all boundaries, all conditioned energies. God surpasses everything – except his own highest nature. In sum, god as Aṣṭadhā Prakṛti is empowered to actualize the living world.

The eight arms of Trivikrama are a fitting expression of Viṣṇu's great deed. The deed, as told in the Purāṇas, is performed by Viṣṇu when he descends to earth as a dwarf. In this *avatāra*, he comes to trick the demon Bali in order to regain the organized world for gods and men. The name "Trivikrama" indicates "he who strides over three worlds in three steps"; the name isolates the foremost component of the deed. The organized world comprises the earth, the mid-region and the heavenly world and these are the three worlds wrested from the demons by Viṣṇu's three steps. Calling the Kuṣāṇa relief (Pl. 18.14) a Trivikrama need not imply that the relief illustrates the purāṇic story. The kernel of the myth, as well as the core component of the dwarf *avatāra* have lengthy antecedents. Viṣṇu's essential character in the Rig Veda stems from his taking three strides (e.g. RV I.154.2 *triṣu vikramaṇeṣu*); with the first step he traverses the earth, with the second, he steps over another visible sphere, but with the third he gains a region beyond the flight of the birds and mortal men (cf. RV 1.155.5). In the Brāhmaṇas, Viṣṇu assumes the form of a dwarf (Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa 1.2.5.5), when the gods and the Asuras contend for the world. It is by the power and pervasiveness of the sacrifice, which is Viṣṇu, that the world is conquered and made safe from rivals (Taittirīya Saṃhitā 2.1.3.1). The epic weaves together these strands in a fashion approaching the purāṇic accounts. Viṣṇu is incarnated as a dwarf in order to trick Bali and wrest the three worlds from the demon. Accompanied by Bṛhaspati, the priest god, the dwarf goes to Bali and asks for three paces of land. The request having been granted, the god covers the three worlds with his three paces, returns the realm to Indra, and, sends the Asuras to the nether world.⁶⁰ These developments in the Mahābhārata could be known to Mathurā's artisans and populace in the Kuṣāṇa age (see Chapter 21).

To convey the rich symbolism of the Trivikrama myth it is hard to think of a more suitable number than "eight". Being the double of "four", "eight" emphasizes the full terrestrial space (i.e. the four quarters plus the four interstices),⁶¹ made safe from the demons. Being the result also of "seven" plus "one", there is additional symbolic value in the number "eight".⁶² Horizontal and vertical space can be expressed by the four quadrants plus the three vertical regions of earth, mid-region and heaven.⁶³ When "one" is added to this "seven", representing "world space", the resultant meaning for "eight" is akin to "spacial totality"; "world whole". Such meanings underscore the critical action of Trivikrama, namely his strides through all the spacial realms of the universe. Reference to the conquest of vertical space is part of Trivikrama's iconography. Rao states that

⁶⁰ E. Washburn Hopkins, *Epic Mythology*, Reprint. Delhi, 1974, p. 211.

⁶¹ Spacial symbolism is important in the iconography, resulting in the option of "four" or "eight" arms for Trivikrama. (T.A. Gopinatha Rao, *Elements of Hindu Iconography* Vol. I, Pt. 1, p. 166). Both numbers refer to spacial directions.

⁶² This is essentially the $x + 1$ method of arriving at symbolic numerology; it is discussed in Chapter 6, pp. 71–72. Cf. Hopkins, *Epic Mythology*, p. 205.

⁶³ Chapter 6, p. 73.

images of Trivikrama can be distinguished into three sorts depending upon whether the left foot is raised to the level of the right knee, or to the level of the navel, or to the forehead. These three levels are intended to represent the earth, the mid-region and the heavenly world.⁶⁴ "Eight-arms" in the iconography of Trivikrama, conjures up all the spacial realms of the universe conquered by the god. "Seven" is not only a spacial number; it is also a ritual number. The altar of the Agnicayana, for example, is composed of seven layers. "Seven" more than any other Vedic number refers to ritual entities. For instance, there are seven ṛṣis; Agni, the ritual fire has seven tongues; the seven sisters are the seven prayers.⁶⁵ When "one" is added to the ritual number "seven", meanings such as "the wholeness of the sacrifice" and "the surpassing greatness of the sacrifice" can result. Accordingly, "eight" may symbolize "sacerdotal supremacy" etc. This symbolic meaning fits the myth which stresses the presence and/or power of the sacrifice from the Brāhmaṇa account onwards. The purāṇas also keep the reference to the sacrifice. In the Vayu Purāṇa's telling, Bali performs a sacrifice at which Viṣṇu appears, preceded by Bṛhaspati, the sacerdotal deity.⁶⁶ Reference to the sacrifice enters into artistic representations. The Pawaya lintel, dating to the fifth century A.D., depicts many ritual items pertaining to Bali's sacrifice – to the right of an image of eight-armed Trivikrama!⁶⁷ The eight arms of Trivikrama herald the god as the auspicious One, the embodiment of the sacrifice, the pervader of all terrestrial and vertical space so as to expel evil and install order.

A Caturvyūha image, it bears repeating, represents the *caturvyūha* doctrine which attributes to the Transcendental Supreme, Nārāyaṇa, four successive emanations (i.e. *caturvyūha*). These emanations are equal to the Supreme Nārāyaṇa and they are the effective means for all further cosmic creations, including the creation of other deities, the world and living forms. A Caturvyūha image depicts the fourfold cosmic emanations. Depictions occur in three different ways in early Indian art; all programs employ some combination of multiple forms or bodily parts.

One arrangement is to depict the four forms representing the four *vyūhas* on four sides of a pillar or block; it is a depiction that accords with some prescriptions given in the (Kāśmīri) Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa.⁶⁸ Nepal preserves this arrangement. One Nepalese example comes from the Cāra Nārāyaṇa temple, in Patan and dates circa 1565 A.D.⁶⁹ Each of the four *vyūhas*, shown on this Nepalese block, has been described in the 1983 publication. Suffice it here to mention mainly those features which address the relationship of the multiplicity convention to the *caturvyūha* concept. The Nepalese image shows a standing anthropomorphic form on each of the four sides of the block. Each deity has

⁶⁴ T.A.G. Rao, *Hindu Iconography*, Vol. I, Pt. 1, p. 164.

⁶⁵ Chapter 6, pp. 73–74.

⁶⁶ Vāyu Purāṇa 2.36.74–86.

⁶⁷ See J. Williams, *Art of Gupta India*, p. 53, for an itemization. For the relation of the lintel to the Kuṣāṇa Trivikrama, see D.M. Srinivasan, "Eight-Armed Viṣṇu".

⁶⁸ See ViDhP III.85.1–42 and cf. A.J. Gail, "On the Symbolism of Three- and Four-Faced Viṣṇu Images: A Reconsideration of Evidence", *Artibus Asiae*, Vol. XLIV, 1983, 297.

⁶⁹ Gail, "Four-Faced Viṣṇu", 297–298.

four arms and attains approximately the same height as the others. The head of each deity appears at about the same point around the block. Circumambulating in the ritually prescribed manner from left to right, the devotee sees each deity in a particular order. The front (the East) side depicts Vāsudeva; to his right (and facing South), stands Saṃkarṣaṇa; to his right (and facing West), stands Pradyumna; lastly, to his right (and facing North), stands the figure of Aniruddha. These are the names attributed to the quadruple forms of the Supreme Nārāyaṇa as early as the Mahābhārata (XII.321–338),⁷⁰ and we may say that the Nepalese Cāra (four) [fold] Nārāyaṇa temple housing the Caturvyūha image illustrates the *vyūhas* already mentioned in the epic. It has been suggested that a Caturvyūha image composed of four independent forms can be called a Caturmūrti;⁷¹ indeed, the Supreme Nārāyaṇa calls the quadruple forms his *mūrtis* in the above noted epic passage.⁷² There is some advantage in comparing such a Caturvyūha image to a Jaina Sarvatobhadra image, which is a Caturmūrti, since the arrangement is identical. (A Jaina Sarvatobhadra image features four different standing Tīrthaṅkaras on each of the four sides of an upright.) Jaina Sarvatobhadra images go back as far as the Kuṣāṇa period; the symbolic significance of such an arrangement goes back even further. From the time of the Vedas, the idea of facing in the four directions, is charged with a deity's omnipresence and omniscience. Agni is "four-faced" (RV 5.48.5) because as the flaming ritual fire, he extends in all directions on earth and possibly beyond. For the same reasons, Agni is said to face in every direction in the AVŚ (4.33.6a = RV I.97.6a; *viśvatomukha*). In the TS (V.6.4.2–3), the four directions are associated with the four sides of Prajāpati whose omnipresence is being emphasized. The Supreme Īśvara of the Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad is said to face in all directions (*sarvatomukha*, 2.16). Undoubtedly, his omnipresence and omniscience is being expressed since all-seeing (i.e. facing in all directions) is equated with all-knowing from the beginning. These notions receive concretization in Jaina and Vaiṣṇava Caturmūrtis. For the Vaiṣṇava Caturvyūha image the disposition associates the four cardinal directions with the four *vyūhas*; they expand outward (*vyūh*), in all directions, moving apart (*vyūh*) from the all-knowing, all-seeing Supreme with whom they are identical. The disposition advances the doctrine perfectly. For this reason and because of the antiquity of carving images on the sides of an upright, the earliest known Caturvyūha image from Bhīṭā is of the Caturmūrti type.⁷³ The Bhīṭā image (Pls. 15.1 & 2; Pl. 16.16) is sculpted on the four sides of the block. Its figures are scaled to human dimensions and the block is likely to have been worshipped by circumambulation. The carved block rests on an unadorned plinth which should have been stuck in the ground, leaving the carved sides exposed for *pradakṣiṇa* worship. Following the *pradakṣiṇa* order in the Bhīṭā image, the same deities appear in the same sequence as in the very much later Nepalese image. However, in the Bhīṭā upright, Saṃkarṣaṇa is

⁷⁰ D.M. Srinivasan, "Caturvyūha and Variant Forms", 48 and fn. 48.

⁷¹ Balaram Srivastava, "Viṣṇu – The Chaturvimsatimurtyah" in *Vaiṣṇavism*, pp. 214–215. The designation comes at the end of ViDhP III.85.1–42, in v. 42.

⁷² Mhbh. XII.321.8; XII.326.43.

⁷³ On the disposition of the figures and additional details on the Bhīṭā Caturvyūha, see D.M. Srinivasan, "Caturvyūha and Variant Forms".

represented by his theriomorphic form, the lion (Pl. 16.16), and Aniruddha by his theriomorphic form, the boar and the Kapila figure appears in the back space that Pradyumna can occupy. Each of the animal forms occurs below a face which is on the same level as the face belonging to the full figure of Vāsudeva on the front of the block (Pl. 15.1) and the face belonging to the full figure of Kapila, backing the Vāsudeva figure (Pl. 15.2).⁷⁴ The worshipper's gaze greets the face of each of the four *vyūhas* as he performs his circumambulation. The basic formula for representation, coordinating the needs of the doctrine with the needs for worship, has hardly changed in over 1500 years! Another Nepalese example is closer in time to the Bhīṭā upright. It is the seventh century A.D. Caturvyūha from the Nārāyaṇa Hiti, in Kathmandu.⁷⁵ The major difference between the Bhīṭā and Nepalese expressions is the use of theriomorphic forms in the former to represent two *vyūhas*. This feature has caused some scholars to withhold acceptance of the Bhīṭā image as a Caturvyūha image. Herbert Härtel remarks that since no texts earlier than the c. eighth century A.D. Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa incorporate the lion and boar references into the Caturvyūha representation, it is not possible to identify the theriomorphic forms as *vyūhas* on a piece as early as the Bhīṭā upright. He further observes that whereas the Harivaṃśa associates the lion plough with Saṃkarṣaṇa, it does not establish the correspondence in a *vyūha* context. For Aniruddha there is no textual reference connecting him with a boar. Härtel does not offer an alternative interpretation for the Bhīṭā upright,⁷⁶ moreover, his criticism can be answered. It has already been cited that a Pāñcarātra text of the Gupta period, the Jayākhyā Saṃhitā, mentions that four-armed Nārāyaṇa has four faces composed of Vaikuṇṭha [i.e. Vāsudeva], Nārasimha, Varāha and Kapila. Second, while it is true that there are no early references known to date which connect the boar to Aniruddha, a late Kuṣāṇa image, described below, shows the boar's head in the *vyūha* context. Also, there are numerous Kuṣāṇa and pre-Kuṣāṇa reliefs showing the lion or the lion's plough with Saṃkarṣaṇa, in addition to the lion's head on the Kuṣāṇa image, described below.⁷⁷ Third, a major factor in proposing the Caturvyūha identification for the Bhīṭā upright is that it demonstrates a correlation between the Caturvyūha doctrine and the *pradakṣiṇa* sequence of the figures on the block. For the Caturvyūha identification to be rejected, a different religious interpretation must be offered to explain the correlation. An identification of the Bhīṭā upright carries with it the burden not only to identify the figures, but also to explain why the figures should appear together, and in the sequence that they do.

⁷⁴ When Vṛṣṇi Vīra names are used, the Western section of the block is reserved for Pradyumna. But different figures can occupy this space. In the Bhīṭā upright, the figure seems to be Kāpila, or the fierce, Raudraic figure. The space can also be filled by Strī (Rūpamaṇḍana III.54) and Śrī (Aparājitprchha ch. 219.17).

⁷⁵ See Mary Shepard Slusser, *Nepal Mandala* Vol. I, Princeton, 1982, pp. 244–245; Vol. II. Pls. 386–387.

⁷⁶ H. Härtel, "Zur Typologie einer Kaschmir-Skulptur", *Jahrbuch Preussischer Kulturbesitz, Sonderband 1*, Berlin, 1983, 106ff.; Gail ("Four-Faced Viṣṇu", 307), offers the interpretation proffered by N.P. Joshi who was the first to publish the Bhīṭā upright ("Unnoticed Finds", 41–43). This interpretation fails to consider the features mentioned above.

⁷⁷ Examples are mentioned in N.P. Joshi, *Iconography of Balarāma*, Delhi, 1979; Figs. 9, 12, 13 and D.M. Srinivasan, "Early Kṛṣṇa Icons", p. 130.

Until recently, the second way of depicting the Caturvyūha notion could only be noticed on images from the Gupta period onwards. Now, thanks to a newly acquired image in the Collection of the University Gallery, University of Florida, Gainesville, this way can already be noticed on a late Kuṣāṇa example (Pl. 18.16; 12.2" ht.). This depiction has one body, four arms and four faces, causing some to call this type a Caturmukhamūrti.⁷⁸ The full form has a human face. To the right and left of the human face are the lateral faces of the lion and boar respectively. The form stands against a back panel. There is no face on the back of the panel which probably rested against a wall. The fact that the lion and boar faces represent *vyūhas* and not *avatāras* has caused considerable confusion in analyses of this sort of image.⁷⁹ From the theological point of view, the lion and boar faces on either side of this sort of an image cannot be *avatāra* forms since in the creation schema, *avatāras* do not occur until after the beginning of creation which starts with the emanation of the four *vyūhas* from the Supreme. There has recently come to light an inscribed bronze depicting the caturmukhamūrti. The inscription though problematic, appears to belong to the Gupta period and to state that Nārāyaṇa is depicted. This type of image, it is suggested, portrays some visible aspect of the Supreme Nārāyaṇa. An analysis of the image comes to the conclusion that this is possibly the Para aspect of Vāsudeva, as Goetz had already suggested for a similar form at the apex of the Devsar halo.⁸⁰ The date of the four-armed Florida Para Vāsudeva can best be determined by the crown; it compares well with the one worn by the late Kuṣāṇa, four-armed Vāsudeva in the Museum für Indische Kunst (No. I 5878).⁸¹ The cylindrical shaped crown relates to a whole series of similar crowns which can be placed in a chronological context because one of them, seen on a relief from Sonkh, was found in an upper Kuṣāṇa layer.⁸² The Florida image shows the lion head to the right and the boar head to the left. Whereas this is the usual position for the lateral heads, it is not the only position since reversals do occur in Gupta art.⁸³ The reason for this (and the possibility that the reversal modifies the doctrine) is difficult to gauge. It is not however so difficult to recognize that the second mode of depiction owes much, perhaps all, to the inventiveness of the Mathurā ateliers.

I should have some trepidations to suggest that the third way of depicting the *caturvyūha* doctrine is probably influenced by *śaiva* artistic forms. The third way shows the bodies of

⁷⁸ Srivastava, "Viṣṇu", pp. 214–216. Cf. Banerjea, *Development*, pp. 408–409, he calls these images Caturmūrti but has in mind the four-faced (or "One in Four") images.

⁷⁹ Also see Srivastava, "Visnu", p. 216, D.M. Srinivasan, "Caturvyūha and Variant Forms", fn. 20. J. Gonda, *Viṣṇuism and Śaivism*. London, 1979, p. 59.

⁸⁰ Goetz says "It represents Viṣṇu in his most popular Pāñcarātra form, Vaikuṇṭha Chaturmukhi (= Para-Vāsudeva)". See H. Goetz, *Studies in the History and Art of Kashmir and the Indian Himalaya*, Wiesbaden, 1969, p. 81. My partial paper title is "Viśvarūpa, Vyūha, Avatāra". The Brāhmī inscription on the base is analyzed by Dr. Lore Sander.

⁸¹ See Härtel, "Early Vāsudeva Worship", Pl. Xa. Also the carving techniques appear similar in these two sculptures. Roy C. Craven Jr. ("A Unique Vaikuṇṭha-Style Viṣṇu (*nārasimha-varāha*) Sculpture from the Mathura Area", *Oriental Art* XXXVIII, No. 3, 1992, 145–153) dates the piece to ca. late 3rd to 4th century A.D.

⁸² See D.M. Srinivasan, "Vaiṣṇava Art", p. 386, Pl. 36.VI.A.

⁸³ E.g. No. 79.260.12 in the Brooklyn Museum of Art (Pl. 18.17); No. D 28 in the Mathura Museum (Fig. 14 in my "Caturvyūha and Variant Forms").

the three *vyūhas* projecting from a central *vyūha* which is Vāsudeva (Pl. 18.18; the fragment is 1' 5" in ht.). Saṃkarṣaṇa/Balarāma arises from the right side of Vāsudeva. The way his upper body projects is a visual statement that the emission process is taking place. The upper body projects upward and outward from its source while the lower part of the body is still inside the source. The dynamic movement of a form pushing, or being pushed, out from its place of origin is given perfect expression (cf. Pl. 17.13). From the crown of Vāsudeva projects the torso of Pradyumna, now quite fragmented. The fourth figure, of Aniruddha, now lost, would have emanated from the left side of Vāsudeva. In short, the three *vyūhas* stem from the central *vyūha* as branches from a tree. Scholars agree that this late Kuṣāṇa image represents the *caturvyūha* concept. But it is not usual to point out that this is neither the oldest nor the most seminal Caturvyūha image. Unlike the aforementioned Caturmūrti and Caturmukhamūrti, the branching configuration does not become an enduring way to render the *caturvyūha* concept. Actually, the piece is an anomaly, being the only Caturvyūha image known to date which uses this configuration. In the domain of *śaiva* art however, this configuration is not rare.⁸⁴ It is a characteristic way of representing Maheśa, the fully manifested anthropomorphic form of the Supreme Śiva. Theoretically, Maheśa has five heads but since the fifth is seldom depicted, the four heads of Maheśa can sometimes be rendered in the branching configuration. The pre-Kuṣāṇa relief from Mūsānagar is the earliest *śaiva* example of the branching configuration (Pl. 17.11). In the Kuṣāṇa period the configuration continues to be used in *śaiva* forms (e.g. Pl. 19.8), which sometimes have considerable similarity with the *vaiṣṇava* Caturvyūha (cf. Pl. 19.9), not only in front, but also in back where a tree laden with fruit is carved (Pl. 19.10), just as appears on the back of the Caturvyūha image (Pl. 18.19). These similarities in sculptural conventions do not imply similarities in doctrinal details. It is true however that both the Caturvyūha and the Maheśa images attest to a common belief in the unfolding process of the Supreme. This is a basic commonality which may have entered into both systems of thought from a common source, the Sāṃkhya school of thought. Perhaps this basic commonality caused the production of the unusual iconographic combination seen in a ninth century Kaśmīri sculpture now in the Berlin Museum für Indische Kunst.⁸⁵ The sculpture is of Harihara, combining the Varāha-vyūha on the left side of Viṣṇu with the Aghora head on the right side of Maheśa.⁸⁶

Regarding the multiplicity of arms, four arms are seen in the Mathurā Caturvyūha images of the second (Pl. 18.16) and third (Pl. 18.18) types. In both these types, Vāsudeva is the only full length form. The god is given the same number of arms he has in his single Mathurā representations (Pls. 18.10 & 11) and in his depictions in the *vaiṣṇava* kinship reliefs made in Mathurā (Pl. 16.5). Therefore, some overlap in symbolic meaning may be expected, the more so since the cakra and gadā seen in the single and kinship

⁸⁴ The configuration is discussed in Chapter 19, p. 264.

⁸⁵ This image is analyzed by H. Härtel, "Zur Typologie".

⁸⁶ On the identification of the right side, see Doris Meth Srinivasan, "From Transcendence to Materiality; Para Śiva, Sadāśiva and Maheśa in Indian Art", *Artibus Asiae*, L 1/2. Note especially the discussion on the ninth century relief. No. 1985.85 in the Collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, 133-134.

representations are also retained in these two types of Caturvyūha representations.⁸⁷ Accordingly the four-arms may well signify action promoting the welfare of human life on earth which is undertaken by the cosmic aspect of the Supreme (i.e. the force of the intensification of the multiplicity convention [four arms plus four heads]). Unlike the first type, represented by the Bhīṭā Caturvyūha image, the Yakṣa element is not prominent in the second and third types. The figural form of Vāsudeva is neither tall, big-bodied nor swollen. There is no scientific evidence that can explain the change, only a reasonable possibility can be offered. About three hundred fifty years separate the Bhīṭā image from the Florida Para Vāsudeva and the Mathura Caturvyūha images. This period extends from the dawning of sectarian art (with its need for models on which to base incipient figural forms), to the first flowering of sectarian art (with its trend towards stabilization of conventions and artistic skills). Whereas in the incipient phase, the Yakṣa's form may have served as a model for the *vyūha*'s figural form due to general conceptual similarities, later ages needed less to rely on the initial model. As refinements in symbolic language as well as sculptural skills were achieved, the representations of Mahā Yakṣas as well as their influence upon other figural forms grows less and less. In Mathurā, there are no large unattached Yakṣas that can be dated to the Kṣatrapa and Kuṣāṇa times,⁸⁸ that is, during the times when the greatest advances were made towards stabilization in symbolic and artistic conventions. Outside of this region, that is, outside of the influencing sphere of the major art school of the time, a few colossi can be located in a few scattered places.⁸⁹ The apparitional nature of a cosmic Being capable of creativity which was so well expressed by Mahā Yakṣa had, in time, come to be expressed by other means, including that of multiplying, (i.e. intensifying) the number of multiple body parts.

Twenty years ago, the great Indian specialist in iconography, J.N. Banerjea, dealt with the subject of religion in art and archaeology in his last book. The concluding observations which follow are offered as homage to his outlook, that art can sometimes do more than illustrate religious documentation. Sometimes art can fill a gap in the documentation.

It is generally assumed by historians of art and religion, and by philologists that Vaiṣṇavism resulted slowly through the amalgamation of three major strands: Vedic Viṣṇu, Bhāgavata Vāsudeva and Brahmanic Nārāyaṇa.⁹⁰ The assumption is maintained in spite of the fact that the evidence needs to be pieced together from texts, inscriptions, sometimes

⁸⁷ Cf. J.N. Banerjea, *Religion in Art and Archaeology*, Lucknow, 1968, pp. 32 and 26.

⁸⁸ Gritli v. Mitterwallner, "Yakṣas of Ancient Mathurā", *Mathurā* p. 377.

⁸⁹ From Sopara, Maharashtra comes the lower portion of what should have been a large standing Yakṣa (see Fig. 33 in R.N. Misra, *Yakṣa Cult*); the Haigunda Yakṣa from Taluk Honnavar District in North Kanara is 1.80 meters and is dated to c. first-second century A.D. (see fn. 9, Chapter 15); the Pawaya (ancient Padmāvatī) Yakṣa in the Archaeological Museum, Gwalior, has recently been dated to c. the second century A.D. (Mitterwallner, *Yakṣas*", p. 369 and Pl. 35.III).

⁹⁰ E.g. J.N. Banerjea, *Religion in Art and Archaeology*, Chapters I and II; Härtel, "Early Vāsudeva Worship"; D.M. Srinivasan, "Caturvyūha and Variant Forms"; Gonda, *Die Religionen Indiens* I, pp. 236-254; *Viṣṇuism and Śivaism*, see especially Chapters I-III. R.G. Bhandarkar, *Vaiṣṇavism Śaivism and Minor Religious Systems*, Reprint. Varanasi, 1965; Pt. 1, especially pp. 1-46; S. Chattopadhyaya, *Evolution of Hindu Sects*, New Delhi, 1970, Section B; J.A.B. van Buitenen, transl. *The Bhagavad Gītā*; Thomas J. Hopkins, *The Hindu Religious Tradition*, Dickenson, 1971; David R. Kinsley, *Hinduism, a cultural perspective*, Englewood Cliffs 1982.

coins and icons. No one record documents a cogent argument for assuming such an amalgamation. There is little need to set out once more how Viṣṇu begins and grows in the Vedas, how Nārāyaṇa gains stature in the Brāhmaṇas, and how Vāsudeva, one of the Pañcavīras, attains eminence in the Bhagavad Gītā; this has been done often, and by many, including myself. So too are the Ghosūṇḍi and Nānāghāṭ inscriptions familiar in this context for they permit a glimpse into the process of amalgamation.⁹¹ I have always accepted both the painstaking methodology and its conclusion because they rely on historical evidence to support the merger theory. Completion of the merger can also be proposed by meager historical evidence. The cult designation "Vaiṣṇavism" does not appear earlier than the late Kuṣāṇa/early Gupta period, and, it is not until the Gupta period that Viṣṇu is mentioned in inscriptions.⁹² Now, from one source, comes strong support for the presence of three separate strands and their measured amalgamation: the Kuṣāṇa assemblage of *vaiṣṇava* images. The images provide data controlled by historical circumstances. The assemblage comes almost entirely from one place (i.e. Mathurā), during a time when the dynastic and cultural ties of the place can be assessed (see Chapter 21). The *vaiṣṇava* assemblage contains images of the three separate strands:

- 1) The Trivikrama image (Pl. 18.14) indicates worship to the Vedic constituency of Viṣṇu,⁹³
- 2) The Vāsudeva images (e.g. Pls. 18.10 & 11), indicate worship to the Bhāgavata god,
- 3) The colossal Bhagavān Nārāyaṇa image (Pls. 18.7–9) indicates worship to that Brahmanic cosmic god

These images cannot yet be labeled "Vaiṣṇava" if that label is understood to convey the belief that Trivikrama IS the Hindu god, Viṣṇu; Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa IS Viṣṇu; Bhagavān Nārāyaṇa IS Viṣṇu. The assemblage does not convey this impression. Indeed it has already been shown that four-armed Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa is *not* Viṣṇu.⁹⁴ Nārāyaṇa's icon is quite distinct from Viṣṇu's, whose symbols do not adorn Nārāyaṇa. The syncretic pull towards Vaiṣṇavism may be operating, but it has not yet been fully achieved. Neither is a theological unity apparent wherein Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa combines heroic and pastoral qualities, and, becomes equated with Viṣṇu-Nārāyaṇa.⁹⁵ The assemblage is an eloquent reminder that Mathurā's complex religious atmosphere contains the energies towards merger, but neither the political climate nor the religious readiness to accomplish it. The assemblage can only be called "Vaiṣṇava" because we know, from the benefit of hindsight, that it moves towards Vaiṣṇavism.

One force assisting a merger towards Vaiṣṇavism is the *avatāra* notion. Interestingly, the *avatāras* that are depicted in the Kuṣāṇa art of Mathurā, all have their antecedents

⁹¹ Summary of the above data in the light of merging tendencies is found in my "Caturvyūha and Variant Forms", pp. 48–51. See also Chapter 14, p. 196.

⁹² Härtel, "Early Vāsudeva Worship", p. 586; Banerjea, *Religion*, p. 4; cf. the evidence from the Bṛhat Saṃhitā, p. 7.

⁹³ As pointed out by Banerjea, *Religion*, p. 36.

⁹⁴ D.M. Srinivasan, "Vaiṣṇava Art", p. 383; H. Härtel, "Early Vāsudeva Worship", pp. 584–587.

⁹⁵ This is the position of Alf Hiltebeitel, "Kṛṣṇa at Mathurā", *Mathurā*, pp. 93–102, who bases some of his views on Madeleine Biardeau's. Cf. A. Hiltebeitel, "Towards a coherent study of Hinduism", *Religious Studies Review*, Vol. 9, No. 3, July 1983, pp. 206–212.

in Vedism, wherefrom, of course, springs Viṣṇu too. The Vedic and epic antecedents of Trivikrama have already been outlined. Antecedents of the Varāha incarnation begin with the Taittirīya Saṃhitā (7.1.5.1). In this text, Prajāpati becomes a boar so as to create the earth. In the Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa (14.1.2.11), the boar Emūṣa raises up the earth. The seeds of the Hayagrīva incarnation (and manifestation of Nārāyaṇa) are present in the later Vedic mythology.⁹⁶ Legends as well as Viṣṇu's identification with the Vedic sacrifice contribute to Viṣṇu's association with a horse's head. The Mahābhārata allows this association to surface in connection with Nārāyaṇa. Nārāyaṇa appears before Brahmā under the cover of a horse's head,⁹⁷ and, Viṣṇu is praised as Hayaśiras (i.e. head of a horse).⁹⁸ There is thus some indication that the three avatāra reliefs from Mathurā (Pl. 18.12–14) illustrate the coming together of strands that characterize the merger towards Vaiṣṇavism itself.

Another force working towards merger is the *vyūha* idea. An early statement of the doctrine, in the Nārāyaṇīya section of the Mahābhārata, brings together Brahmanic Nārāyaṇa and the Bhāgavata deities, by attributing a fourfold nature to the former and naming each *vyūha* with the name of one of the latter.⁹⁹ Why these names (and the gods) were chosen to designate the four *vyūhas* is not altogether clear. It seems reasonable to suppose that as the divinized Vṛṣṇi Vīras gained prominence their worship developed into the more formal Bhāgavata religion.¹⁰⁰ The art of Mathurā contains some traces of their growth in stature. The Vṛṣṇi Vīras are depicted two-armed, as human beings, and multi-armed as gods. Their kinship connections prompted the incorporation of Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa and Saṃkarṣaṇa/Balarāma into Jaina art, in addition to their depictions in the Vṛṣṇi kinship triads. A crossover from kinship to *vyūha* representation, without too many significant iconographic changes, can be proposed for the god Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa. But for Saṃkarṣaṇa/Balarāma two quite distinct iconographic types can be noticed.¹⁰¹

The analysis of multiple limbs in vaiṣṇava art has revealed the existence of the different strands in the process of merging towards Vaiṣṇavism. The findings are due to a re-shuffling of the existing data according to classifications codified by later ages (and sages), but apparently valid in earlier times. Realigning the data thus has provoked a fresh appraisal of religion in art.

⁹⁶ Suvira Jaiswal, "The Demon and the Deity: Conflict Syndrome in the Hayagrīva Legend", *Vaiṣṇavism*, pp. 42–43.

⁹⁷ F.D.K. Bosch, "The God with the Horse's Head", *Selected Studies in Indonesian Archaeology*, The Hague, 1961, pp. 137–152.

⁹⁸ Mhbh. XII.325.4 (No. 90). Cf. Bosch, "Horse's Head", p. 143.

⁹⁹ D.M. Srinivasan, "Caturvyūha and Variant Forms", 48–49.

¹⁰⁰ Cf. J. Gonda, *Viṣṇuism Śivaism*, p. 52.

¹⁰¹ See D.M. Srinivasan, "Vaiṣṇava Art", pp. 388–389, or, Chapter 16, pp. 218–219.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

ŚAIVA MULTIPLICITY: THE GERMINATION OF GOD

It ought to follow syntactically: if one wishes to understand the religious significance of Kuṣāṇa icons of Śiva with multiple bodily parts, then one focusses the analysis on Kuṣāṇa icons of Śiva with multiple bodily parts. Also, this does not seem to be the case. If analyses of later śaiva art are any indication,¹ then one of the first pitfalls to avoid is an analysis based only Śiva icons with the multiplicity convention. It is necessary to place the Kuṣāṇa icons of our concern into the entire assemblage of śaiva icons made during the first half of the first millenium A.D. In recent years, two excellent studies have surveyed the early forms of Śiva. The doctoral dissertation of Gerd Kreisel² and N.P. Joshi's study.³

I ought to be reluctant to embark on yet another survey. My main excuse for scanning once more the Kuṣāṇa representations of Śiva is that the following review extends the geographical limits set in Kreisel's work and classifies the material differently than is done in Joshi's work. These factors have noteworthy implications for the understanding of śaiva icons with multiple bodily parts. There is no attempt in the review that follows, to repeat detailed descriptions that can be found elsewhere, or to mention parts of the corpus having no direct bearing upon the icons of our concern.

The assemblage to be reviewed consists of sculpture and coinage mainly from the Northwestern regions and the Gangetic regions. The assemblage in each region is viewed from the standpoint of three typologies which are visually distinct and different from each other. These three typologies are: Liṅga, Mukhaliṅga, and the full figure of Śiva.

It is mainly in the Gangetic regions, and particularly in the town of Mathurā that these typologies define the range of Kuṣāṇa śaiva art. There are four free-standing, plain Liṅgas assigned to the period, and they come from Mathurā and the neighboring region. The three Mathurā Liṅgas are all large and rather realistically conceived (see Mathura Museum Nos. 2885;⁴ 652;⁵ 80.3;⁶ also State Museum, Lucknow No. H1); they continue thus the precedent set in the preceding ages. The head of the Liṅga can be decorated with an encircling wreath (Mathura Museum Nos. 652; 80.3), or with a circle of flower

¹ For analyses of post-Gupta śaiva art based on placement of forms in architectural contexts see D.M. Srinivasan, "Śaiva Temple Forms: Loci of God's Unfolding Body" in *Investigating Indian Art*, eds. M. Yaldiz and W. Lobo, Berlin, 1987, pp. 335-347.

² See Gerd Kreisel, *Die Śiva-Bildwerke der Mathurā-Kunst*, Stuttgart, 1986.

³ N.P. Joshi, "Early Forms of Śiva" in *Discourses on Śiva*, ed. Michael W. Meister, Philadelphia, 1984, pp. 47-61.

⁴ For a description, see Kreisel, *Śiva-Bildwerke*, p. 176.

⁵ For a description, see Kreisel, *Śiva-Bildwerke*, p. 177.

⁶ For description, see Gritli v. Mitterwallner, "Evolution of the Liṅga", *Discourses on Śiva* (see ref. in fn. 3), p. 20.

petals (Mathura Museum No. 2885). The inscribed Jateśvara Liṅga, whose visible portion is about two feet high, stands three miles from Sadabad (Mathura District). The Chaumā Liṅga from Agra District is also big (circa 1.2 m. in ht.); it is decorated at the visible base of the shaft with four different representations facing the quadrants: a water jar, a female head (or, possibly, an offering bowl),⁷ a pot-bellied yakṣa or gaṇa, and a couchant lion.⁸ It must again be stressed that during this age, as during the pre-Kuṣāṇa ages, plain Liṅgas are realistically fashioned – and worshipped (see Mathura Museum No. 2661) – in the area where Brahmanic culture is strongest.⁹

The Mukhalinga typology receives perhaps greater definition in the Kuṣāṇa period than any other form of Śiva. Some variety is introduced in those Ekamukha Liṅgas that can be comfortably dated between the first and third centuries A.D. (State Museum, Lucknow No. H 2; National Museum, Delhi 66.225; Russek Collection No. 246 IMG; Mathura Museum Nos. 1615; 5382; Doris Wiener Gallery S 342;¹⁰ Norton Simon Collection F 72.16, 6SA [Pl. 19.1]). The Liṅga in these specimens is not realistic (except National Museum No. 66.225). It has not been sufficiently emphasized that the head, or Mukha, most frequently depicted is that of the ascetic, or Yogīn, aspect of Śiva. The head is identified by the presence of the ascetic locks (*jaṭajūṭa*); the strands are raised in a topknot and some strands may fall behind the ears (Pl. 19.1). A moustache and a third eye may also be found on the head of the ascetic (Pl. 19.1). One Ekamukha Liṅga showing the terrific or Aghora aspect of Śiva exists (State Museum, Lucknow No. H 2). On the Lucknow example, the third eye is positioned horizontally, but during the same period it can also be positioned vertically (e.g. the late Kuṣāṇa Norton Simon piece seen in Pl. 19.1). The provenance of all these Ekamukha Liṅgas is Mathurā;¹¹ no other center produced such a large quantity during the Kuṣāṇa and Gupta periods combined. None can be attributed to South Indian sites. Western India has one colossus stemming either from Khed-Brahmā or Śāmalāji, which U.P. Shah ascribes to the Kuṣāṇa period.¹² The Gupta sites of Udayagiri (Cave 4), Khoh, Bhumara, Khamharia each boast of an Ekamukha Liṅga¹³ as does Uchahara.¹⁴ In contrast, Mathurā stands not only as the major center of production, but also as the major center of worship; overwhelmingly, the findplaces of the Ekamukha Liṅgas are in Mathurā.

⁷ This interpretation is given by Kreisel, *Śiva-Bildwerke*, p. 78; Fig. 6 and p. 178.

⁸ Illustrated in N.P. Joshi, "Some Kuṣāṇa Passages in the Harivaṃśa", *Indolog-Tagung*, 1971, Wiesbaden, 1973, Figs. 179–180.

⁹ I am aware of one plain Liṅga whose provenance is outside of the Gangetic area. It is a third century A.D. limestone Liṅga with an octagonal shaft found during the excavation at Nāgārjunakonda. The findplace reminds that the Ikshvākus were sympathetic to Śaivism, being worshippers of Mahāsena. Mathura Mus. No. 2661 is in J. Rosenfield, *The Dynastic Arts of the Kushans*, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1967, Fig. 41.

¹⁰ See Kreisel, *Śiva-Bildwerke*, pp. 180; 183; 185; 187; 184. Possibly Mathura Museum No. 2206, which Kreisel discusses on page 188 should be included.

¹¹ Kreisel (*Śiva-Bildwerke*) attributes several other Mathurā Ekamukha Liṅgas to the late-Kuṣāṇa period; see his Figs. 20, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 28, 29, 32.

¹² See U.P. Shah, *Sculptures from Śāmalāji and Roḍā (North Gujarat) in the Baroda Museum*, Baroda, 1960, p. 80; Fig. 54.

¹³ See these four pieces in Joanna G. Williams, *The Art of Gupta India*, Princeton, 1982.

¹⁴ See V.S. Agrawala, "A Survey of Gupta Art and Some Sculptures from Nachna Kuthara and Khoh", *Lalit Kala*, No. 9, 1961, 22ff. and Figs. 1 & 2.

A unique Dvimukha Liṅga from Aring, Mathura District, was probably made during the late Kuṣāṇa period (Mathura Museum No. 462). The principle face represents the Yogīn. The face has a horizontal third eye and a broad moustache. On the opposite side of the thin Liṅga shaft is a face usually identified as that of a yakṣa or gaṇa.¹⁵ Joanna Williams has recently, and convincingly, proposed that this face could be that of a female, and that the Liṅga with two heads could represent the splitting of the male and female halves of the Ardhanārīśvara concept.¹⁶

An innovation probably accomplished in the Mathurā workshops during this age was to render the Pañcamukha Liṅga as a Liṅga encircled by four heads (i.e. the Caturmukha Liṅga). This innovation did not supplant the theoretical model. For example, a Pañcamukha Liṅga from Mathurā, belonging to the transitional period of the third–fourth century A.D., consists of four Ekamukha Liṅgas joined together around the central Liṅga whose head is now missing¹⁷ (Mathura Museum No. 516). Other Pañcamukha Liṅgas were made from time to time,¹⁸ and, other ways were devised to portray the five aspects of Śiva.¹⁹ However, from the Kuṣāṇa period onwards, it becomes the norm to represent the five aspects of Śiva by four heads encircling the Liṅga, which itself reminded of the fifth head. Probably the rationale for this innovation provided by the 15th century *Rūpamaṇḍana* (see Chap. 14, p. 186 and fn. 3) was operating much earlier.

It is true that there is no strict uniformity in the type of Mukhas found on a Kuṣāṇa Caturmukha Liṅga, nor is there uniformity in their arrangement.²⁰ However, in each of the five examples known to date, one head can be identified as that of Aghora. Since the Aghora head is traditionally consigned to the Southern direction, it is possible to associate the other Mukhas with the remaining directions. When this is done, a rather remarkable consistency in arrangement becomes apparent. First, there is consistency in the choice of the main head, or the Mukha facing the Eastern direction. Either the Yogīn or the Uṣṇīṣin aspect faces East. Second, a schema beyond the binary preference for the main head is apparent. The earliest Caturmukha Liṅga comes from the vicinity of the Mahāvidya Devī Temple in Mathurā (National Museum No. 65.172).²¹ The Yogīn head faces East, and continuing clockwise, Aghora faces South, Uṣṇīṣin West and Brahmācārī North (Pl. 19.2 showing the Aghora head in the center). The Uṣṇīṣin aspect of Śiva is charac-

¹⁵ Cf. the description and illustration in Kreisel, *Śiva-Bildwerke*, pp. 209–210 and Figs. 64a–b. Kreisel identifies the reverse head as that of a Gaṇa.

¹⁶ Joanna Williams, “An Ardhanārīśvara-Liṅga”, *Kusumanjali: new interpretation of Indian art and culture*; M.S. Nagaraja Rao ed. Delhi, 1987, p. 301.

¹⁷ Kreisel (*Śiva-Bildwerke*, p. 205), records the presence of strands of hair on the central shaft. Cf. the description of this piece in V.S. Agrawala, “A Catalogue of the Brahmanical Images in Mathura Art”, *U.P. Historical Society*, 1951, p. 29; J.N. Banerjea, *Hindu Iconography*, p. 461.

¹⁸ E.g. the 11th–12th century Pañcamukha Liṅga from Virinchipuram, Tamil Nadu, described by I.K. Sarma, *Early Śaiva Art*, pp. 80–81.

¹⁹ E.g. see T.S. Maxwell, “Aspects of Śiva”, 41ff.

²⁰ Joshi, “Early Forms of Śiva”, p. 52. I am not including in this discussion a Caturmukha Liṅga from Amaravati described by Sarma in *Early Śaiva Art*, pp. 74–75. It is a stray find. Sarma sees “the stamp of Sātavāhana workmanship”, but other art historians, myself included, do not see it.

²¹ See description and illustration in Kreisel, *Śiva-Bildwerke*, pp. 201–202; Figs. 57a–d. The style of the turban is a good indicator of an early date; see discussion in my paper “Pre-Kuṣāṇa Śaivite Iconography”, *Discourses*, (full ref. fn. 3), p. 36.

terized by the presence of a headdress, usually the turban with the large central crest. The other Mathurā example having the Yogīn head in the East has the Aghora head in the South, the Brahmācārīn in the North and the Ardhanārīśvara head in the West. This example, coming from the Russek Collection (No. 176 IMG; Pl. 19.3 showing the Ardhanārīśvara head on the right and the Aghora head on the left), is unique in featuring Ardhanārīśvara (i.e. the androgynous aspect of Śiva) on a Mukhalinga.²² Caturmukha Liṅgas having the Uṣṇīṣin head in the East show an even greater degree of uniformity in the arrangement of the heads. All three sculptures (Allahabad Museum No. 636;²³ Bharat Kala Bhavan 22755;²⁴ Mathura Museum No. 72.23²⁵ [Pl. 19.4] showing the Aghora head in the center), have the Aghora head in the South, the Yogīn head in the West and two sculptures have the female head of Umāvaktra in the North; the third (Bharat Kala Bhavan 22755), no longer preserves the Northern head. Of the five Caturmukha Liṅgas, three come from Mathurā (Pls. 19.2–4), one comes from Kauśāmbī (Allahabad Museum No. 636) and perhaps No. 22755 also comes from Kauśāmbī.

The likelihood that some underlying program governs the arrangement of the Mukhas on a Caturmukha Liṅga is borne out by the arrangement of the four heads on full figures of Śiva. Within the third typology, there are some Mathurā sculptures which show the god with four heads; here, as with the caturmukhas of a Liṅga, the main head is either the Yogīn or the Uṣṇīṣin. Two sculptures still have the full figure intact; of these, the better preserved is the figure in the Russek Collection (No. 177; Pl. 19.5). The god stands in front of the Liṅga. He is crowned with the large crest of the turban and the third eye is placed vertically on the brow. The god, smiling and regally erect, has his right hand in the *abhaya* mudrā, and the left holds a small vessel at the hip. He is ithyphallic, wears a dhoti and is decked in earrings and necklaces. The three ancillary heads, oriented in the directions, cannot be sharply distinguished; their most conspicuous feature is hair whose strands are combed back. The other complete figure (Mathura Museum No. E 12; Pl. 19.6), shares numerous features with the Russek image. The full figure also shows the Uṣṇīṣin aspect. The figure is much destroyed but it is probable that the right arm was raised in *abhaya*, that the figure wears a dhoti and holds a small pot in the left hand resting on the hip.²⁶ From the left shoulder projects a head covered with matted locks combed back; it has a general similarity with the side heads of the Russek image (Pl. 19.5). Probably, just as in the Russek image, a head similar to the one on the left should have originally projected from the right shoulder. The reverse (Pl. 19.7) of No. E 12 shows another full figure, different from the one on the front. The male, clad in a dhoti, is short and pot-bellied. The possibility that a Liṅga surmounted the multiple heads of this icon is suggested by Kreisel.²⁷ A fragment in the Mathura Museum (No. 47.3259),

²² Cf. Kreisel, *Śiva-Bildwerke*, pp. 204–205.

²³ Pramod Chandra, *Stone Sculpture in the Allahabad Museum*, Bombay n.d. p. 63.

²⁴ Doris Meth Srinivasan, "Iconological Studies of Recent Mathurā Acquisitions in the Bharat Kala Bhavan", *Chhavi II*, Rai Krishnadasa Felicitation Volume Bharat Kala Bhavan, 1981, pp. 102–103.

²⁵ Kreisel, *Śiva-Bildwerke*, pp. 203–204.

²⁶ More descriptive details are in Agrawala, *Brahmanical Images*, pp. 25–26; Kreisel, *Śiva-Bildwerke*, pp. 212–213.

²⁷ *Śiva-Bildwerke*, p. 213.

belongs to this group of four-headed figures having the Uṣṇīṣin as the main head (Pl. 19.8). However, more than heads project from the central figure, which should have originally been a complete anthropomorphic figure.²⁸ Radiating from the Uṣṇīṣin head-dress are three torsos whose heads are no longer preserved. The arrangement recalls a somewhat similar arrangement seen on the Mathurā Viṣṇu Caturvyūha of the late Kuṣāṇa period (Pl. 18.18). The fragment seen in Pl. 19.8 probably belongs to the *śaiva* and not the *vaiṣṇava* sector. For one, the pre-Kuṣāṇa Mūsānagar relief (Pl. 17.11) already extends the possibility of a turbaned central *śaiva* figure from which project three radiating figures.

Another reason for assuming that the four-headed fragmented figure (Pl. 19.8) is *śaivite* is that its radiating figures compare reasonably well with the position of the radiating figures in two other, indisputable *śaiva* sculptures. These sculptures also show a four-headed figure, but the central or main head is that of the Yogīn aspect. The first example is the Mathurā sculpture dating perhaps to the late Kuṣāṇa period²⁹ (Mathura Museum No. 382; Pl. 19.9). Its *śaiva* nature was first pointed out by R.C. Agrawala who noticed the third eye on the central and lateral heads.³⁰ The central Yogīn head is superimposed by a two-armed male torso within a nimbus. Probably the right hand of this male once gestured in *abhaya* mudrā and the left carried a small water pot. It is not possible to identify this torso further, but we may conjecture that it represents an emanation since the form compares well with the upper torso emanating from Vāsudeva in the Caturvyūha icon (Pl. 18.18). The terrific and tranquil features of the heads on either side of the Yogīn figure are recognizable (Pl. 19.9). The terrific head is apparently the Aghora head and the contrasting countenance could perhaps be the Brahmacārin head.³¹ These heads relate to each other in much the same way as the heads of a Caturmukha Liṅga whose main, or Easterly, head is the Yogīn Mukha.³² The sculpture should have originally portrayed a full-length figure with four heads. The stone below the chest is jagged and uneven, indicating that the sculpture does not represent a four-headed bust. Moreover, the tree carved on the back (Pl. 19.10) seems to be incomplete, again indicating that the image was larger than it is now. The figure could have been standing; it could also have been sitting, as is the case with the second example of the Yogīn figure with radiating forms. This *śaiva* male appears on the fourth century terracotta from Rang Mahal, Rajasthan (Pl. 19.11). The Rang Mahal terracotta is a veritable kingpin for interpreting the whole series of *śaiva* images with projecting heads or torsos. Seated besides his consort, Umā, in the manner recognized as portraying the Umā-Maheśvara theme, the male in this terracotta gives some idea of what an early Maheśvara, or Maheśa, image looks like. Maheśa is ithyphallic and seated on the bull. The Yogīn head of the full figure

²⁸ Originally, the god's image should have been very large; now, it measures 3' 9" in ht., though broken at the waist.

²⁹ This sculpture has been variously dated, from early Kuṣāṇa period (R.C. Agrawala, "Four-Faced Śiva and Four-Faced Viṣṇu at Mathurā", *Vishveshvaranand Indological Journal*, Vol. III, Pt. 1, 1965; 108) to the Gupta period (Kreisel, *Śiva-Bildwerke*, p. 213).

³⁰ "Four-Faced Śiva", 107.

³¹ Kreisel, *Śiva-Bildwerke*, p. 214.

³² The heads in the Northern, Eastern and Southern directions compare with the heads on the Caturmukha Liṅga NM 65.112 and the Russek Collection No. 176 IMG.

has the third eye on the brow. Lateral faces project from the shoulders of the figure, and a face with long, flowing hair projects from the top of the Yogīn head. This two-armed emanation holds the sun and the moon in his hands. On the basis of the Rang Mahal Maheśa, it can be entertained that the other fourfold śaiva figures could also represent Maheśa. Visually, these figures interconnect with the Rang Mahal Maheśa. The Rang Mahal Maheśa holds a water pot in the left hand as does the main figure in the Russek image (Pl. 19.5), the main figure in No. E 12 from the Mathura Museum (Pl. 19.6), the Mūsānagar seated figure (Pl. 17.11), and the upper torso of No. 382 from the Mathura Museum (Pl. 19.9). The Russek figure is, like the Rang Mahal Maheśa, ithyphallic, fully adorned and marked with the third eye. The four-faced image in Pl. 19.9 is adorned and shows the third eye. The Mūsānagar figure is adorned and ithyphallic. The Russek figure (Pl. 19.5) and E 12 (Pls. 19.6 & 7) have lateral heads with combed-back strands of hair; this type of hairstyle is found on the head projecting from the top of the Rang Mahal Maheśa. The head projecting from the top of the Mūsānagar figure (Pl. 17.11), also has this hairstyle. Further, the Mūsānagar upper projecting form holds the sun and the moon just as the upper projecting form in the Rang Mahal terracotta. Finally, the three torsos radiating from the head of the central figure in Mathura Museum No. 47.3259 (Pl. 19.8), are obviously meant to be emanatory forms just as are the heads emanating from the Rang Mahal Maheśa and from the broken central figure in Pl. 19.9. These interconnections affirm the view, already proposed by Kreisel, that all these images are representations of Maheśa.³³ In addition, these interconnections show that a Maheśa image can have either the Yogīn or the Uṣṇīṣin head as the main head. That is, a Maheśa of the Kuṣāṇa age exhibits the same binary preference for the main head as does a Kuṣāṇa Caturmukha Liṅga. And remembering that the heads of the Maheśa depicted on Plate 19.9, relate to each other as do the heads on a Caturmukha Liṅga, the possibility opens up that a formal, theoretical connection may exist between a four-headed Maheśa and a Caturmukha Liṅga. More on this later.

The third typology includes other full figures which do not however feature multiple bodily parts. Ardhanārīśvara can appear as part of a group of gods (e.g. Pl. 1.3, being Mathura Museum No. 2520),³⁴ or alone (Victoria and Albert Museum No. I.M. 5-1931;³⁵ Mathura Museum Nos. 15.800; 874; Los Angeles County Museum of Art No. L. 83.46, which is quite similar to the Ardhanārīśvara in the Pritzker Collection,³⁶ and the Ardhanārīśvara-Liṅga found at Agroha in Hariyana).³⁷ It may be noted that the sculptures from the V & A, the Los Angeles County Museum, the Pritzker Collection and from Agroha are all from Mathurā and all show the androgynous form standing before the Liṅga.³⁸ There

³³ Kreisel (*Śiva-Bildwerke*, pp. 210-211), also considers the four-headed fragment (NM 66.24), having the Yogīn as main head, a Maheśa image. I would add Mathura Museum No. 32.2134. Though very fragmentary and worn, the forms of a Yogīn central figure surrounded by lateral faces and a superimposed torso can still be made out.

³⁴ The piece is fully considered in Chapter 1, pp. 19-23.

³⁵ For the illustration and description, see D.M. Srinivasan, "Brahmanical Ascetic", Pl. IV, Fig. 14 & p. 4.

³⁶ Illustrated in S.J. Czuma, *Kushan Sculpture*, Fig. 60, p. 134.

³⁷ Williams, "Ardhanārīśvara-Liṅga", pp. 299ff.

³⁸ The Pritzker Ardhanārīśvara-Liṅga and the one from Agroha are close in date.

has recently come into the Russek Collection (No. 709 IMK), a Kuṣāṇa Ardhanārīśvara from Mathurā that shows no Liṅga³⁹ but exhibits two unique features. The red sandstone sculpture is about three and a half feet in height (Pl. 19.12). That means originally, before the head, neck and shoulders were destroyed, the sculpture may well have been close to life size. This is the largest Ardhanārīśvara known to date and ought to have been a major icon in some śaiva temple located in Mathurā.⁴⁰ The other distinctive feature in this hitherto unpublished piece occurs below the feet of Ardhanārīśvara. Two distinct forms representing vāhanas can still be made out. The lower section, where the animals are carved, is very washed out, but the outlines of the animals are still discernible and they are not the same (Pl. 19.13). The animals are posed rump to rump, in the middle of the image and underneath the central drapery fold of the deity. The foot of the female side, on the left, juts forward more than the male foot and it is clear to see that there is a bull's hump before the male's foot whereas no such hump exists on the animal under the female side. Also the animals are differentiated by size, the animal on the female side being a bit larger than the one on the male side. It is not unexpected that Śiva and Pārvatī have different vāhanas; of course they do, and both the bull and lion may be shown in the same piece under the god and goddess respectively (see below). But, this is the first time that different vāhanas are noticed in an Ardhanārīśvara sculpture; parenthetically this is also one of a very few Ardhanārīśvara sculptures still preserving the feet and lower portion (only Mathura Museum Nos. 15.800 and 2520 also show the lower portion). Therefore it is not quite clear, whether the differentiation seen on the Russek Ardhanārīśvara is truly unique or circumstantially unique, due to our present limited sampling. A few depictions of the divine couple (Umāpati) were made in Mathurā during the Kuṣāṇa times (Mathura Museum Nos. 31.2106; 34.2495;⁴¹ G 52);⁴² the type continues into the Gupta period and achieves considerable beauty.⁴³ One example of particular interest in light of the two different vāhanas seen on the Russek Ardhanārīśvara, is the Bhīṭā representation of Umāpati seated, with bull and lion resting below their feet (Pl. 19.14). It is a piece demonstrating the residual artistic vitality of Bhīṭā.⁴⁴ Two Kuṣāṇa lower portions of what should have originally been full figures of Śiva must also be counted in this focussed survey. The first is of ithyphallic Śiva standing in front of the bull (Mathura

³⁹ I have not been able to verify whether the Liṅga of No. 709 IMK could have been cut or broken.

⁴⁰ We can surmise the existence of śaiva temples in the town on the evidence of an inscription from Gotiputra, Mathura Museum No. 71.8. It mentions a *devakula* within a sacred complex for the god Maheśvara. See R.C. Sharma, "New Inscriptions from Mathurā", in *Mathurā: The Cultural Heritage* pp. 312–313. The oft repeated and outdated observation that private worship of Brahmanical gods alone existed in Mathurā (cf. Czuma, *Kushan Sculpture*, p. 135), must expand to include the implications of such an inscription and the Brahmanical colossi. Probably in Mathurā, there was both public and private adoration given to Śiva, Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa and other *vaiṣṇava* gods, and to the Warrior Goddess.

⁴¹ Noted in Joshi, "Early Forms", p. 57.

⁴² Described by Kreisel, *Śiva-Bildwerke*, pp. 232–233 & Fig. 102. He also cites, on page 233, a fragment, illustrated in Fig. 103.

⁴³ See the Śiva and Pārvatī from Mathurā in the Russek Collection, illustrated in Czuma, *Kushan Sculpture*, p. 129, Fig. 56.

⁴⁴ J.H. Marshall, "Excavations at Bhīṭā", *Archaeological Survey of India; Annual Report, 1911–12*, Pt. 2, Calcutta, 1915; p. 34, Pl. XXV.49.

Museum No. 3340).⁴⁵ The second is often identified as Śiva due to presence of a gaṇa to the side and a lion in the back (Mathura Museum No. 214; from Mat). N.P. Joshi identified a figure of Śiva wearing a turban and standing in front of the Liṅga.⁴⁶ There is one form of Śiva for which only the head remains (Bharat Kala Bhavan No. 21490; Pl. 19.15). The unusual features of this Mathurā sandstone carving caused me initially to identify the head as Agni:⁴⁷ The head has raised hair in the shape of flames, bulging eyes which roll upward and a furrowed brow. Upon further study, the head seems to represent Śiva as Virūpākṣa. Virūpākṣa, with hair on his face and terrifying features, has "a flamed-face with whirling eyes. His hair is raised up" (Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa, Ad. 57).⁴⁸ This form of Śiva could have been known earlier than the Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa since the name "Virūpākṣa" occurs in the Mahānārāyaṇa Upaniṣad, within the context of the Rudra-litany.⁴⁹

Early Śiva icons from the Northwest are a curious lot. The images with multiple bodily parts seem to have little in common with each other. Ranging from the time of Huviṣka through the fourth century A.D., they are sufficiently distinct from one another to suppose that each represents a different śaiva god, or a different aspect.

The three-headed, six-armed figure on the small relief from Akhun Dheri has matted hair piled high and wears a sacred thread and a dhoti. The god is ithyphallic and stands before the bull. The attributes that remain can be identified as the vajra (Härtel: a drum),⁵⁰ the water vessel, and the trident. The relief resembles the figure with bull on the coins of Vāsudeva I.⁵¹ But, as Dr. Härtel cautions, it must be remembered that the Akhun Dheri relief is at least two hundred years later than the coins. Another late Kuṣāṇa image found in Kūḥah, Mesopotamia, has some resemblance to the Akhun Dheri figure.⁵² This ithyphallic figure holds in his four hands a vessel, what may be a trisūla, the vajra and he raises the upper right hand at the shoulder height with palm turned inwards. He stands in front of the bull, of which only the hind legs remain. "The head(s) of the image and the top (trident?) of the staff are lost".⁵³ Taddei dates the image to the fourth century A.D., a date he also assigns to another Gandharan śaiva image now in the Pontecorvo Collection in Rome.⁵⁴ Possibly coming from the Taxila area, the Pontecorvo image is of a three-headed, four-armed god whose erect phallus remains visible through the loin

⁴⁵ Described by Kreisel, *Śiva-Bildwerke*, p. 213 & Fig. 73. See also his Fig. 71, described on p. 216; it is another Kuṣāṇa broken torso of ithyphallic Śiva from Lohrapatti-Sonkh. In Fig. 73, the god wears a folded garment; in a fragment from the Gupta period (Mathura Museum No. 3764) he wears a tiger skin.

⁴⁶ "Some Unnoticed Finds of Iconographic Interest", 43-44.

⁴⁷ D.M. Srinivasan, "Bharat Kala Bhavan", 102; image No. 21490.

⁴⁸ P. Shah, *ViDh P* Vol. II, p. 155.

⁴⁹ See discussion, Chapter 10, p. 124.

⁵⁰ Herbert Härtel, "A Śiva Relief from Gandhāra", *South Asian Archaeology, 1985*, edited by K. Frifeld and P. Sørensen, London, 1989, 392-396.

⁵¹ Robert Göbl, *System und Chronologie der Münzprägung des Kusānreiches*, Wien 1984, p. 44, Type 10, series 511, reverse.

⁵² Maurizio Taddei, "On the Śiva Image from Kūḥah, Mesopotamia", *Annali* Vol. XXXI (N.S. 21), 1971, 548ff.

⁵³ Taddei, "Kūḥah", 550.

⁵⁴ Maurizio Taddei, "A New Śiva Image from Gandhāra", *South Asian Archaeology, 1983*, edited by J. Schotsmans and M. Taddei, Naples, 615-628.

cloth. The central head has a moustache and the third eye, inclines towards the right side of the brow in the same way as is seen on the Ardhanārīśvara from the Victoria and Albert Museum (see fn. 35). The side heads resemble animals; the right is that of a boar; the left is that of a bovine. The attributes held in the four hands are a rayed sun disc, a water vessel, a rosary and a trident on a long staff. Taddei suggests that due to the iconographic syncretism of the image, it may represent some composite divine form. A three-headed, four-armed *śaiva* figure from the earlier half of the Gandharan period has recently come into the collection of the Museum für Indische Kunst, Berlin. Härtel notes that this Śiva figure, on a small schist relief, carries the triśūla in the right back hand and the kamaṇḍalu in the front left hand, just as occurs in the Pontecorvo image. Other points of comparison are lateral animal heads on the Berlin image, and the erect phallus visible above the garment. However, we must agree with Härtel's observation that "these common elements are the *iconographic units* of an otherwise loosely connected group of composite icons. The Berlin relief obviously represents another god. . . ." ⁵⁵ The flame-like hair and protruding eyeball of the third eye seem to emphasize the terrific aspect more than in the Pontecorvo image. Härtel tentatively suggests that the image expresses Śiva's terrific and mild aspects by means of, respectively, the lateral lion and antelope heads. The four-headed portion of a *śaiva* form, gifted to the Linden-Museum by Prof. S. Eilenberg, is important because it is from Gandhara; it dates to c. the third century A.D. and is thus the only known four-headed Gandharan specimen from this early period. ⁵⁶ The front face displays the verticle third eye and the ascetic's locks and could, on that account, be identified as the Yogīn face of what may have been a full figure of Maheśa. But since the conventional Aghora features are not found on the face to the right (i.e. South) of the frontal (i.e. main or Eastern), face the identification of the faces is thrown into doubt. Apart from some comparison, made by Kreisel, between the lateral right head on the Linden-Museum piece and on the Akhun Dheri relief, ⁵⁷ there is no similarity between the former and the other Kuṣāṇa *śaiva* figures from the Northwest. It is thus another Northern *śaiva* sculpture with the multiplicity convention that has no apparent precedent.

Even the two *śaiva* examples which do not feature the convention, are dissimilar, and are not found further South. The first, on frieze blocks from a Kuṣāṇa temple at Surkh Kotal, Afghanistan, is a diminutive representation of a two-armed nude male behind a bull, probably Śiva behind Nandin. ⁵⁸ Quite different is the small Śiva figure emanating from the Bodhisattva in a Gandharan relief now in the Peshawar Museum. ⁵⁹ Taddei proposes that the ithyphallic figure of Śiva, holding the trident and water pot, represents

⁵⁵ Härtel, "Śiva Relief", 394.

⁵⁶ Gerd Kreisel, "Caturmukhalinga and Maheśamūrti – the cosmic aspects of Śiva", *Tribus*, Nr. 32, December 1987, 105–116. See also Kreisel, *Śiva-Bildwerke*, pp. 152–154 and Pls. A 19a & b.

⁵⁷ Kreisel, *Śiva-Bildwerke*, p. 154.

⁵⁸ G. Fussman, "The Māt devakula: A New Approach to Its Understanding", in *Mathurā: The Cultural Heritage*, p. 198.

⁵⁹ See M. Taddei, "Non-Buddhist Deities in Gandharan Art – Some New Evidence", *Investigating Indian Art*, (full bibliographic reference in fn. 1), pp. 349ff.

a form assumed by the Bodhisattva to convert those mortals more susceptible to the form of Śiva than to any other.⁶⁰

The most significant difference between the assemblage of śaiva art from the North and the South is that the three typologies seen in the śaiva art of the South are not present in the North. This difference profoundly influences the methodological approach used to establish the meaning of śaiva icons with multiple bodily parts. For it will be shown below that the notion of a śaiva triad is the most fundamental way of conceptualizing the śaiva Reality from the Vedic period onwards, and the three typologies symbolize this threefold Reality. The absence of the first two typologies in the art of the Northwest, and the presence only of the third, namely the full figure of Śiva, is therefore a critical difference.⁶¹ In addition, the several disparate images of Śiva from the Northwest do not interrelate as do the images in the third typology in the Southern assemblage. The Northwestern images do not seem to constitute a group, nor a series, nor even a set governed by general conventions, as for example the Maheśa series, the Ardhanārīśvara series, or the Umāpati series in the Gangetic assemblage. Each Northwestern image presents, in addition to the “*iconographical units*”, some non-trivial features unique unto itself. The one uniting element in these images is their common failure to incorporate the norms occurring in Mathurā śaiva art of the Kuṣāṇa period. Conversely, the Mathurā assemblage also does not incorporate norms occurring in the art of the Northwest. The trident, so prevalent in the Northwest is absent in Mathurā art, and, Śiva who is usually two-armed in the art of Mathurā (quite the opposite from the Northwest), neither occurs nude, nor like the two-armed Śiva emanating from the Bodhisattva.

Lest it be considered unsound to compare a few images from various Northwestern sites with the rather large śaiva assemblage mainly from one Gangetic center of production, it must be countered that the resultant contrast is sufficiently stark to override this technical disparity. The contrast bespeaks of some undeniable regional differences.

Kuṣāṇa coins go a long way towards confirming two zones of śaiva iconography in Kuṣāṇa times. Using the twenty-one different types of Oēṣo (= Śiva) coins identified by Göbl,⁶² it is now possible to determine which traits are the norm and which are anomalies in the representations of Śiva on Kuṣāṇa coinage. If one plots Göbl's twenty-one types according to rulers (i.e. from Vima Khadphises through Vāsudeva II) and notes the popularity or singularity of any given type, then the following general observations on śaiva iconography and the multiplicity convention can be made:

- 1) The trident is one of the most frequently represented attributes, and, it is seen from the beginning of Kuṣāṇa coinage, being on the coins of Vīma Khadphises (Types 1, 2, 3).
- 2) Beginning with Kaniṣka's coinage, Śiva can be depicted with a nimbus and four

⁶⁰ See Taddei, “Non-Buddhist Deities”, pp. 353–357, where textual evidence for this interpretation, plus for the other emanating figures in the relief, is cited.

⁶¹ Härtel (“Śiva Relief”, 392), mentions a small Caturmukha fragment from Gandhara in a private collection. Since it is neither illustrated, described, dated, or assigned a provenance, it has, unfortunately, been left out in the above account.

⁶² *Münzprägung des Kuṣāṇreiches*, pp. 43–44.

arms which hold the vajra, the trident, the kamaṇḍalu and a goat (Type 4). In combination with the vajra, trident and kamaṇḍalu, he may hold an investiture wreath (Type 5). The depiction of four-armed Śiva is far more frequent than the two-armed depiction (Type 6).

3) Some of Huviṣka's coinage shows the four-armed god as on Kaniṣka's coinage. Beginning with this ruler, a three-headed, four-armed god appears on two coin types (7 & 8). One of these coins (Type 7) is unique among the entire Kuṣāṇa coin type; it shows the god naked and ithyphallic; the right lateral head may be a lion's head; a nimbus surrounds the god; in his hands are a wheel, a goat held by the horns, a trident on a long staff and a vajra. The other coin (Type 8) shows the club and jar (or bag) as attributes, and the uṣṇīṣin headdress on the three heads. On the coins of Huviṣka, it is more usual to depict the god with the multiplicity convention than without it (Types 17–21).

4) On the coins of Vāsudeva I, it is more usual to depict the god without the multiplicity convention (Type 9) than with it (Types 10–12). Both depictions like to show the god standing before the bull, already on Vima Khadphises' coins (Type 1).

5) Features of Type 9 (above) continue to be the popular way of representing Oēṣo in the coinage of Vāsudeva II. Types 13 and 14 (Pl. 19.16), which show the god with three heads and four arms were reassigned from Vāsudeva II to Vāsudeva I by R. Göbl (*Donum Burns, Die Kuṣānmünzen im Münzkabinett Bern und die Chronologie*, Wien, 1993; Pl. 15; No. 175, old 526). The cross-legged posture of the god, standing before the bull, also occurs on Vāsudeva II coinage (Type 15, without multiplicity convention).

The most characteristic *śaiva* iconography on the Kuṣāṇa coins does not reflect the prevailing *śaiva* iconography in the Doab. Concentrating on the usage of the multiplicity convention, we may note that four-arms and the investiture wreath occur once in the art of the Doab (see below), whereas on the coins and on the art of the Northern regions these are well established iconographic features. Multiple heads is a feature adopted both on coins, Gandharan works and reliefs from the Doab. But there are important distinctions. Ancillary animal heads, noticed on sculpture from the Northwest, are not associated with Śiva in the Kuṣāṇa sculpture from the Doab. Three-headed Oēṣo, when first seen on the coins of Huviṣka, is always seen with four arms. This combination is absent in the art of the Doab. (The same combination is also the only one occurring on the coins of Vāsudeva II, whereas the coins of Vāsudeva I show the multi-headed god with two and four arms.) Finally, the two typologies of "Liṅga" and "Mukhaliṅga" are not found on Kuṣāṇa coins or in the art of the Northwest. And this despite the fact that Kuṣāṇa coins do depict a non-anthropomorphic *śaiva* symbol, to wit, the trident on the coins of Vima Khadphises (Göbl, Type 3, Series 9).⁶³ Indeed, the trident, together with the nimbus, the lotus, the wheel and the vajra, all associated with Śiva on the coins, are

⁶³ Another is the humped bull (i.e. Nandin) found on the Śaka gold medal from Puṣkalāvati. See Gérard Fussman, "Monnai d'Or de Kaniṣka inédite, au type du Buddha", *Revue numismatique*, Tome XXIV, 1982, 167–168, and fn. 38.

absent in the art of the Doab.⁶⁴ In the Doab, Śiva *ūrdhwaretas* is common; on Kuṣāṇa coins it occurs once, although on Gandharan reliefs it is seen quite often.

The disparities between Kuṣāṇa iconography in the Doab, in Northwestern art and on the coins are remarkable. The differences are so great that it must be supposed that the art of each sphere responded to different cultural influences.

If the aim is to understand the religious significance of Kuṣāṇa icons of Śiva having multiple bodily parts, then the assemblage best expressing Śiva's fundamental nature takes analytical precedence. From the Vedas onwards, the threefold nature of Śiva is expressed by his three ontologies. The output of Gangetic *śaiva* art gives expression to these ontologies via the three typologies mentioned above. The three typologies are thus the critical determinatives of Śiva's fundamental nature. These typological divisions – and not divisions into *saumya* and *ugra*, or, aniconic and iconic – are the diagnostic divisions for *śaiva* art. To repeat, from the beginning of devotional Śivaism, the notion of a triad is basic to the nature of Śiva and, at the dawn of *śaiva* art, the Gangetic assemblage alone expresses it.

A quick overview of Vedic benchmarks affirming the triadic Śiva Reality may not be out of place here. The Mahānārāyaṇa Upaniṣad, in the section giving praise to Rudra, associates the divinity with three sequentially related entities that accord well with the three typologies in the *śaiva* art.⁶⁵ First Rudra's *liṅga* nature is invoked (vss. 271–275). Next occur the names that the later tradition assigns to the five mukhas of the Pañcamukha Liṅga, and this fivefold evolute is identified as Sadāśiva. Lastly, praise is rendered to specific names of god that not only sound like names of various forms taken by god in his earthly manifestations, but indeed, are concretized as *mūrtis*, in several instances, in the Gangetic assemblage. (I cannot suppress the fact that the Śaka gold metal from the North, mentioned in footnote 63, contains on the obverse and reverse, depictions that might relate to the name “Ambikāpati”, contained among the Mahānārāyaṇa's last set of names.) The threefold sequence of which the Mahānārāyaṇa speaks is already discernible in the earlier Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad. The higher (or Para) Brahman identified with God is recognized as being without parts (*niṣkala* ŚU 6.19), and without a distinguishing sign (*alīṅga* ŚU 6.9). The embodiment of Para Brahman (a sort of Para Rudra-Śiva) is a lower Brahman conceived as god in a subtle form. The name of the god is Rudra. Below the subtle form is the god's material form, called the “*śivā tanū*”, the auspicious corporeal manifestation. The Upaniṣad implies that each of the three states is sequentially related to the next, but it does not make a deliberate theological statement to that effect. Instead, this treatise clearly delineates between the states and suggests that they are three stages leading towards the manifestation of god.

The notion of a triple unfolding Reality continues and becomes a well developed doctrine used in the medieval *śaiva* Āgamas to explain the nature of Śiva. The Āgamas, too, describe each of the three entities in language corresponding to the three typologies.⁶⁶ In

⁶⁴ By c. the third century A.D., trident is found on a representation of Śiva on clay seals from Sankisa (old Sankāśya), U.P.; see Joshi, “Early Forms”, p. 49.

⁶⁵ See Chapter 10, pp. 119–120ff. for the full analysis.

⁶⁶ The details of the doctrine and its relation to *śaiva* art have been worked out in my paper “Śaiva

these theistic texts, the Highest, or Para, Śiva is equated with the Highest, or Para Brahman. It is now Para Śiva who is defined as *niṣkala*, the formless, undifferentiated Absolute in utter transcendency. From *niṣkala* Śiva begins the movement leading towards manifestation. The fully manifest stage is called *sakala*, the divine “with apprehensible form”. The *sakala* form does not arise directly from *niṣkala* Śiva. There is an intermediary stage called *sakala-niṣkala*. In this stage, god is neither the transcendent formless (i.e. *niṣkala*), nor the manifested form (i.e. *sakala*), but somewhere in between. We may say that god in the intermediary stage is “the formless with form”, or, “divinity in the process of expanding outward”.

The Āgamas agree that the most fitting symbol for Para Śiva is the plain Liṅga. It is plain so as to symbolize the undifferentiated stage. The Liṅga showing the emergence of head(s) (i.e. Mukhaliṅga) symbolizes the *sakala-niṣkala* stage. In this stage, the unfolding process begins and the head(s) of god are the first to emerge. The Āgamas call the *sakala-niṣkala* form “Sadāśiva” who is described as having five heads. Since Sadāśiva has five heads and is symbolized by the Mukhaliṅga, it follows that the Pañcamukha Liṅga image represents Sadāśiva. Sadāśiva is represented by more than the Pañcamukha Liṅga. Being divinity in the process of unfolding, Sadāśiva can be effectively represented as any partially exposed anthropomorphic entity. Theoretically, the partially exposed anthropomorphic entity should have five heads, just as this is the theoretical number of heads of a Mukhaliṅga. In actuality, a lesser number of heads can appear. From Sadāśiva arises Maheśa, the completely unfolded body of god. Since Maheśa emanates directly from Sadāśiva, he shares the physical properties of his predecessor. In art, Maheśa, just as Sadāśiva, may be depicted with one, three, four, or five heads, irrespective of the medium but depending upon how closely the image follows the theoretical model. It is from Maheśa that all other gods, creatures, and all further *mūrtis* of Śiva proceed.

To summarize, the āgamic theology connects each Reality of Śiva with a concept, or concepts, that bespeak of each of the three typologies.

Para Śiva = the plain Liṅga

Sadāśiva = the Mukhaliṅga or any other partially exposed anthropomorphic form

Maheśa = the full anthropomorphic form

The purpose of this āgamic theology is to explain how the unseen Absolute evolves into manifest god. The mystery is elucidated by postulating a progressive unfolding which relies on biological metaphors. Fully manifest god does not germinate directly from the Absolute. It is by stages that god becomes apprehensible. The stages are threefold and the overall movement towards manifestation is analogous to the movement leading towards human birth. The movement is downward. The heads emerge first. (The movement is not upward the way a plant or tree would grow on earth.)⁶⁷ After the heads,

Temple Forms” and amplified in “From Transcendence to Materiality Para Śiva, Sadāśiva and Maheśa in Indian Art”, *Artibus Asiae*, Vol. L, 1/2 1990; 108–142. The following discussion summarizes theories and examples developed in those papers.

⁶⁷ In an idiosyncratic work entitled *Viśvarūpa*, (Delhi 1988), T.S. Maxwell establishes a main theme for interpreting early icons with multiple heads; he correlates them with the branching tree motif, often carved

more of the body comes into view. When the full body has emerged, the third stage of the unfolding process is complete.

There is no doubt that even the earliest surviving *śaiva* temple forms depict the unfolding process by means of the three iconic types mentioned in the Āgamas. Between the sixth and eighth century A.D., Śiva shrines in many different parts of India display the revelatory progressions, beginning with the Liṅga and ending with the full body of god. Placement of the forms in the temple's plan substantiates theology. Disposition of the iconic types varies considerably, as does the type of shrine I consider a temple. In the eighth century Lankeśvara Temple at Ellora⁶⁸ the *garbhagrha* contains both the presence of Para Śiva and Sadāśiva represented by the plain Liṅga and the tricephalic, partially exposed anthropomorphic entity on the back wall. Maheśa is present in the western end of the cave. The seventh century Kalyānpur Liṅga from Rajasthan, a sculpture planned as a temple, features the unfolding process on the Eastern or main side of the sculpture. Reading from top to bottom: first comes the dome of the plain Liṅga, next comes one head of the Caturmukha Liṅga and last comes the full figure of god. It is not difficult to correlate these forms with the three Śiva Realities, namely Para Śiva, Sadāśiva and Maheśa. The seventh century Kaśmīri liṅga-shaped diptych, a sort of portable temple, presents the progressions on its outer and inner side.⁶⁹ The outside depicts the Ekamukha Liṅga, symbolic of Sadāśiva, and the inside opens up to reveal the fully emergent Maheśa. Another Northwestern liṅga-shaped diptych (dated to the seventh–eighth century), illustrates the process of manifestation in much the same way. But here the inner side shows Umā-Maheśvara. The mid sixth century Great Cave at Elephanta holds *niṣkala* Śiva within its cavernous *garbhagrha* and the tricephalic partially exposed anthropomorphic form of Sadāśiva in the Southern recess of the Cave. Elephanta does not contain an image of Maheśa, but it does show a series of *mūrtis* that arise from Maheśa. In the seventh century Śiva Temple at Kusumā, Rajasthan, the *garbhagrha* contains the plain Liṅga of Para Śiva and a large image of partially revealed, tricephalic Sadāśiva. The large central panel above the doorway leading into the *garbhagrha* originally contained an image of Lakulīśa-Maheśvara.⁷⁰ The earliest Southern example represents the progression in a manner typical of the region. The example comes from a Yellesvaram (A.P.) stone votive shrine

in the back of such images. This correlation reverses theological concepts. The cosmic forms of Śiva, Viṣṇu and the Devī do not relate to the earth in the same way as do phenomenal things, including trees. Gods come down to earth from on high, whereas a tree and earthly things grow up from the earth. A cosmic god's movement towards full manifestation starts from the top. The morphology of early temple architecture traces that descent from the transcendental, to the *ākāśa*, and lastly, to the visible sphere. See my "Transcendence to Materiality", for more examples and discussions. Cf. the sequence in listing the thirty-two body marks of the future Buddha, common to all Buddhist schools; the sequence starts with the feet and ends with the head, "probably because it was considered most prominent or important". Konow, *Daśasāhasrika Prajñāpāramitā*, pp. 57 & 72. Roth's explanation is that Buddha worship begins with the veneration of the Bodhi tree, which starts with worship of its base. When Buddha images begin they are treated in the same way. However, when a list of the Buddha's bodily signs begin at the top, it is a craftsman's list who starts to give shape to the image from the top downward (see G. Roth, "Notes on Citralakṣaṇa", 1023–1026, full citation in fn. 33, Chap. 1).

⁶⁸ For details see my "Śaiva Temple Forms", p. 341.

⁶⁹ Analysis of this piece is in "From Transcendence to Materiality".

⁷⁰ This image is illustrated in Michael W. Meister, "A Field Report on Temples at Kusumā", *Archives of*

dating to the fifth century A.D. (Pl. 19.17).⁷¹ Inside the cella is a carving on the wall facing the opening. The carving depicts the Liṅga and in front of the Liṅga sits Maheśvara with Umā. Emphasis solely on the *niṣkala* and *sakala* natures of Śiva is mentioned in the Rauravāgama⁷² and is indeed popular in southern *śaiva* shrines.

There are no extant Śiva temples from the Kuṣāṇa period to help us decide where, and how, the art dealing with the triadic nature of the god was originally placed. The evidence from Mathurā does however help to provoke ideas on the placement of these *śaiva* images. The Kuṣāṇa Brāhmī inscription from Gotiputra (Mathura Museum No. 71.8) already mentioned (see fn. 40), states that a temple (*devakula*), a water tank, a garden, an assembly hall and a commemoration tablet (*śilāpaṭṭa*) were erected to please the god Maheśvara. This inscription indicates the presence of a Śiva temple complex in addition to the simple outdoor Liṅga shrines whose existence can be surmised from reliefs.⁷³ Therefore we may expect the images to have been placed on outdoor altars or in temple settings. It also seems likely that the three typologies represented in the *śaiva* art of Mathurā relate to each other, raising the possibility that typologies could appear together in a worshipful context. The series of Mathurā Caturmukha Liṅgas which have the Yogīn as main head are complemented by the series of four-headed Maheśa images having the Yogīn as main head. The series of Caturmukha Liṅgas having the Uṣṇīṣin as the main head are complemented by the series of four-headed Maheśa images having the Uṣṇīṣin as main head. Here, then, comes to fruition our earlier finding that a Kuṣāṇa Maheśa may have some formal connection with a Kuṣāṇa Caturmukha Liṅga. A complementary set also exists on the Ekamukha paradigm. I do not wish to imply that the very pieces forming complementary sets should have originally been found together in Śiva temples at Mathurā; the evidence cannot, and need not, be pushed that far. I do wish to propose that the noticeable interrelationships among the three typologies in Mathurā art, together with the presence of *śaiva* shrines at Mathurā, must influence the interpretation of the *śaiva* assemblage. The presence of all these intricate characteristics in Mathurā art cannot be circumstantial. One need only remember the extent of *śaiva* artistic characteristics on coins and on the sculpture of the Northwest to realize that the iconography in the Mathurā assemblage has extraordinary focus and direction. That focus and direction is routed in *veda*, the desire to know the nature of god.⁷⁴ The interpretation offered below, therefore,

Asian Art XXIX, 1975–1976; Fig. 10. On the rationale for introducing the image of Lakulīṣā in this theological context, see D.M. Srinivasan, "From Transcendancy to Materiality".

⁷¹ The photograph and information were supplied by the late Dr. Marilyn Hirsh; the same shrine is illustrated in C. Sivaramamurti, *Early Andhra Art and Iconography*, Hyderabad, 1979; Fig. 46. He dates it to the 6th century.

⁷² Bruno Dagens, *Les enseignements architecturaux de l'Ajītagama et du Rauravāgama*, Pondichery, 1977, p. 107.

⁷³ See State Museum Lucknow No. B 141; Mathura Museum Nos. 3625; 2661. Evidence of a 3rd–4th century *śaiva* temple complex also comes from Nāgārjunakonda. The temple to Śiva called Pushpabhadrasvāmin, according to an inscription, records a permanent temple endowment for the maintenance of the temple. D.C. Sircar and K.G. Krishnan, "Two Inscriptions from Nagarjunikonda", *Epigraphia Indica* Vol. XXXIX, 1961–1962, pp. 17–20. Not entirely convincing is R.C. Sharma's supposition that a *śaiva* shrine may exist in Mathurā at the time of Śodāsa because of the presence of the partial figure of a bull on a Śodāsa epigraph ("New Inscriptions from Mathurā", p. 311).

⁷⁴ See Chapter 1: Theory, for this usage of "veda" with early Hindu icons.

assumes that images symbolic of Śiva's triadic nature could have existed (together?) in places dedicated to his worship, and, that the three typologies represent sequentially related, not isolated, typologies. It is not yet certain whether we ought to attribute to these typologies the terminologies that the Āgamas will attribute to them (e.g. Liṅga, whence emanates Sadāśiva, who evolves into Maheśa). However it is impossible to ignore that these three types of forms interconnect in a manner forecasting the āgamic doctrines. Upon reflection, the theological interconnections among these three art forms, even in this early period, may not be so unexpected. The theological foundations of triadic Śiva had been laid in the Brahmanic traditions so venerated in Mathurā: Vedic speculations prepared for the acceptance of the threefold Śiva Reality, and Vedic literary expressions as well as Vedic orthopraxy prepared for its visualization by means of biological symbolism.

The triadic Śiva Reality begins with the plain Liṅga, being the ontological symbol of the imperceivable Supreme. It is in the shape of the phallus to denote Śiva's capacity to produce every form of life. In that the Liṅga is ever erect, god's inexhaustible plentitude is expressed. The Liṅga may thus have evolved out of the Vedic speculative heritage which reserves *pūrṇa* ("fullness") and *niṣkala* ("undifferentiated") as attributes of the Highest.⁷⁵ The plain Liṅga is more than the sign of the fullness of the Supreme; it holds that fullness within. The Liṅga is the container of Śiva's seed or essence. Were it otherwise, Mukhas could not germinate from the Liṅga.

A Mukhalinga is a symbol of self-revelation. First to arise out of god's essence (i.e. Liṅga) is the form of the cosmic creator (i.e. Maheśa), and he emerges by stages, the first stage being the emergence of his heads (Mukhas). The five heads represent the fivefold aspectual nature of the emerging god; each Mukha calls attention to a different aspect. The fifth head, associated with the name Īśāna, can be symbolized by the central Liṅga.⁷⁶ The four heads of the Kuṣāṇa Caturmukha Liṅga face in the four directions. To face in the four directions reinforces the notion that the emerging god will fill out all the surrounding space and be coexistent with it. Further, to face in the four directions (i.e. *viśvatomukha*) is to see all. Thus, the omniscience and omnipresence of the divinity who emerges from the Liṅga is declared.⁷⁷ These meanings stem from the Vedas and the language of "four". Meanings associated with four Mukhas, it must be remembered, come not via the language of "four" associated with Mukhas (since the diagnostic number of Mukhas must at all times be "five"), but rather via the language of "four" in association with the directions. The directional orientation of a Mukha on a Kuṣāṇa Mukhalinga is already prefigured in the manner in which the upaniṣadic lower Brahman coexists within space: "That Plenum is below . . . above . . . to the West . . . to the East . . . to the South . . . to the North. It is indeed all this world".⁷⁸ A Mukhalinga is an icon of intent. It declares

⁷⁵ Note the description of the Highest in Brhad Āraṇyaka Upaniṣad 5.1.1. *Pūrṇa*, besides defining the essence of Śiva's Liṅga, is the *sine qua non* of the Mahā Yakṣas in pre-Kuṣāṇa art (Chapter 15, pp. 200–203), who inform early *vaiṣṇava* imagery (see Chapter 15, p. 197) and some early *śaiva* art (see Chapter 17, p. 237).

⁷⁶ In later Hindu architecture, the Ākāśalinga finial represents Īśāna. See M.A. Dhaky, "The 'Ākāśalinga' Finial", *Artibus Asiae*, Vol. XXXVI.4, 1974, 307ff.

⁷⁷ This symbolism is discussed in Chapters 2 & 6.

⁷⁸ Chāndogya Upaniṣad 7.25.

that the embodied form of the Supreme is becoming revealed. To anticipate the āgamic terminology, a Mukhalinga is Sadāśiva.

The most frequently represented Mukhas of a Kuṣāṇa Caturmukha Liṅga are usually represented in opposing pairs. In the Kuṣāṇa examples, the tranquil head is always opposite the terrific or Aghora head (e.g. Allahabad Museum No. 636 and Mathura Museum No. 72.23 [Pl. 19.4]), and, the Uṣṇīṣin head is always opposite the Yogīn head (e.g. National Museum No. 65.172; Allahabad Museum No. 636; Bharat Kala Bhavan 22755; also see Pl. 19.4 where the Uṣṇīṣin head is to the left of Aghora and the Yogīn head is to the right). These oppositions could suggest that the opposing Mukhas in a Mukhalinga are a mutually dependent pair. Possibly, the aspectual nature of the emerging god can be the combination of binary sets of aspects. The device of counterpoising to define the awesomeness of the Highest is used throughout the Vedas and especially with Rudra-Śiva.⁷⁹ So, for example, the god emerging from a Caturmukha Liṅga like the one seen on Plate 19.4 could represent the embodiment of divine ambivalence (the opposition of the wild/terrific and the tranquil heads) and divine majesty (the opposition of the turbaned and ascetic heads). An interesting and unique set of opposing Mukhas occurs in the Caturmukha Liṅga in the Russek Collection (No. 176 IMG). The Yogīn head in the East is balanced by the Ardhanārīśvara head in the West (Pl. 19.3). The appearance of an Ardhanārīśvara Mukha need not be so startling when it is remembered that Śiva is both male and female in a verse in the Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad (IV.3), recounting that when the god is born he becomes facing all directions (*viśvatomukha*). God as the lord who is half woman is the self-sufficient Cause of the universe. God as the great Yogīn is the destroyer of the world of experience. Taken together, these opposing Mukhas could announce god's universal cosmic energies in much the same fashion as the opening salutation in the Rudra-litany of the Mahānārāyaṇa Upaniṣad (vs. 270): "Homage to the Lord of Destruction, homage to Him who puts an end to destruction". The Mukhas in the North and South are, respectively, the Brahmacārin (seen on the right in Pl. 19.18) and the Aghora (Pl. 19.3) heads. Aghora, with the third eye, the grimacing open mouth, the outcropping tusks, is a study in forces surfacing. The chief characteristic of a Brahmacārin is a containment of forces, both sexual and ritual.⁸⁰ The latter is called *tapas*; it is the heat of asceticism accrued from the retention of heat produced by ritual activity. Possibly these opposing Mukhas invoke god's indestructible forces: though ever expanded, they are ever built up and renewed. It is fair to say that I am not at all certain about these interpretations nor the correctness of interpreting Mukhas in sets.⁸¹ I suspect however that the counterpoising of opposites plays some importance in an art striving to convey god's nature and that is why the suggestions are offered. The conjecture is encouraged by the Viṣṇudharmottara

⁷⁹ See Chapter 5, pp. 48–52. This device also operates in the complementary qualities ascribed dual divinities in the Vedas. See J. Gonda, *The Dual Deities in the Religion of the Veda* in *Verhandelingen der Koninklijke Nederlandse Akademie van Wetenschappen* Nieuwe Reeks, Deel 81, Amsterdam, London, 1974.

⁸⁰ See AV 11.5. Cf. O'Flaherty, *Asceticism*, pp. 41; 324.

⁸¹ In effect, William's suggestion (see fn. 16), that the Dvimukha Liṅga (see Pl. 19.21) opposes the male and the female heads of Śiva's Ardhanārīśvara aspect, can be taken as another example of an interpretation based on an opposing set of mukhas.

Purāṇa III.48.5 and 6. This section prescribes the disposition of faces of the Pañcamukha, and sets the fierce face on the north, opposite the mild face on the south.

Maheśa completes the intent of the Mukhalinga. Even at this early period we can attribute name(s) to the fully emerged form, names which concur with the later āgamic appellations. We can also work with the supposition that this form functioned as the creator of the world. Already the creative endeavor of Mahādeva in the Mahābhārata (XIII.14.183), results in the emission of Brahmā from his right side and Viṣṇu from his left, forecasting thereby the creative labours of Maheśvara in the Purāṇas and Āgamas.⁸² Already this Mahādeva has in the epic the name “Caturmukha”, indicative of his four visible heads.⁸³ And, already the god named Maheśvara is honoured with a large temple complex in Mathurā in c. the first century A.D. (*supra*). It is of course completely within the Brahmanic tradition to separate the agent of creation from the ultimate source of creation. In effect, Maheśa is the śaiva realization of a theological position stipulated in the Atharva Veda. Maheśa, the demiurge, manifest in front of the Liṅga, the source, is reminiscent of Prajāpati, who, in the Atharva Veda, is the active force emerging from his source, Skambha (“pillar” etc.).⁸⁴

The Maheśa in the Russek Collection (No. 177, Pl. 19.5) could be regarded as a summation in stone of many Brahmanic tenets. Maheśa as “Caturmukha” stands, fully revealed with his emblems of greatness. He is in front of the Liṅga, his source. He is verily the Great Lord (*mahā + īśa; mahā + īśvara; mahā + deva*) whose majesty is announced by the crested turban. His supramundane knowledge and yogīn powers are represented by the heads facing the quadrants and the third eye. His capacity to create is insinuated by the *ūrdhvairetas*. The *kalāśa* he holds suggests both his creative fullness⁸⁵ and his power of self-containment in the guise of a Brahmacārin.⁸⁶ His power to bestow emancipation is attested by his gesture of *abhaya*; this power is ascribed to Maheśvara in the Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad. The text says that Maheśvara can bestow “entrance into Brahman” (ŚU 6.10). The Russek Maheśa is an excellent example of an early representation of the śaiva agent of creation.

The Caturmukha Maheśa in Pl. 19.6 (Mathura Museum No. E 12), displays his awe-inspiring nature by means of an iconography quite similar to that of the Russek Maheśa. This Maheśa seems to have a complementary figure opposing the main Uṣṇīṣin figure. In keeping with the hypothesis that Maheśa is the end of the unfolding begun in the

⁸² J.L. Shastri, editor, *The Śiva Purāṇa*, Delhi 1970, Vol. I, p. 213; st. 56 & 57. See also the Kūrma Purāṇa; cf. the account of the Liṅgodbhavamūrti in Cornelia Dimmitt and J.A.B. van Buitenen, *Classical Hindu Mythology*, Philadelphia, 1978, pp. 205–206. Ajita Āgama, Paṭala 1; st. 25–32; see N.R. Bhatt, editor, *Ajita Āgama*, Vol. I, Pondichery 1964, pp. 3–4. The Kiraṇāgama’s sequence is given in J. Gonda’s *Medieval Religious Literature in Sanskrit*, Wiesbaden, 1977, p. 188. Note that in the purāṇa and epic passages, all the gods emanate from Maheśvara, whereas in the Ajita Āgama and the Kiraṇāgama, a chain is indicated wherein only one god, Rudra, arises directly from Maheśvara.

⁸³ See Chapter 11.B, p. 151.

⁸⁴ Discussed in Chapter 3, Section III.

⁸⁵ For the symbolism of the pūrṇaghaṭa which is evoked, see Chapter 15.A.

⁸⁶ On the waterpot as one of the few possessions of a Brahmacārin, see D.M. Srinivasan, “God as Brahmanical Ascetic”, pp. 4ff. and fns. 32 & 33. A physical pot, of course, defines boundaries between what is and what is not contained within.

Mukhalinga stage, then the opposing head on the reverse of the Uṣṇīṣin head ought to be the Yogīn head; it will be remembered that the Yogīn and Uṣṇīṣin heads always form a complementary unit on Kuṣāṇa Caturmukha Liṅgas. Unfortunately, the reverse head of E 12 has been completely destroyed (Pl. 19.7). However, the seated Maheśa from Mūsānagar shows precisely these two opposing heads (Pl. 17.11). It may now be noticed that this ornamented Maheśa with *ūrdhwaretas*, who has the *kalaśa* in his left hand and who gestures in *abhaya* with the right, has on that account, numerous similarities with the Russek Maheśa. Seated on a throne with the lion beneath his feet, the Mūsānagar Maheśa is likewise surrounded by emblems declaring the divine majesty of the Great Lord.

The unfolding process can also be traced on the paradigm of the ekamukha. The progression has the Yogīn as main head. Some particulars of the Mathurā Yogīn Ekamukha Liṅgas have already been introduced. It may now be added that the Ekamukhas are furnished with limited adornments. A simple necklace (Mathura Museum No. 66.225; also see Pl. 19.1) which may be of Rudrākṣa beads (cf. Mathura Museum No. 61.5382) can be seen. The complete figure of Maheśa with ascetic's locks should be recognized in the well-known four-armed figure in front of the Liṅga that Coomaraswamy first published as a second century A.D. Mathurā Liṅga (Pl. 19.19). Clothed in a dhoti, he also wears a necklace plus heavy double-looped earrings, a feature encountered on some Caturmukha Maheśas having the Yogīn as main head (Pl. 19.9) and the Uṣṇīṣin as main head (Pl. 17.11). Maheśa raises his two extra hands above his head as he puts a wreath upon his locks. His right natural hand is in the *abhaya* mudrā and the natural left is clenched at the hip. Maheśa's wreath-bestowing gesture recalls that some plain Liṅgas from Mathurā are decorated with an encircling wreath and that an investiture wreath is often held by Oṣo on Kuṣāṇa coins. Indeed, the notion of an investiture wreath is most compelling in this context. It would mean that Maheśa is performing an act of self-coronation. As the primordial Great Lord, he alone can establish his sovereignty. Maheśa's majesty over his creations is also alluded to by his four arms. "Four" recalls the earthly quadrants as well as the four regions of vertical space. Therefore, "lordship of the entire earthly realm" is implied. "Four" is, in addition, a number charged with "productivity" and "creativity" and these meanings have application to Maheśa's role. (Parenthetically, it bears repeating, that the semantics of "four" need not change when applied to Maheśa's or to Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa's arms since the language of "four", and symbolic numbers in general, are independent of cultic usages.) Four-armed Maheśa standing in front of his source, the Liṅga, announces his creative powers both by means of the Liṅga and his four-arms. The image (Pl. 19.19), now lost is the forerunner of the extant four-armed, single headed Maheśa images appearing in temples all over India after the Gupta period.

Were self-revelation to involve some sort of dual entity, it might resemble the Mathurā Dvimukha Liṅga (*supra*) and the Gāmārī Liṅga (Bharatpur Dist. Rajasthan). This suggestion is offered with considerable hesitation and it is not meant to imply that these two sculptures actually formed a unit in some ancient shrine. The suggestion is based on the presence of addorsed Mukhas and addorsed full figures, emerging, in each case, from a center Liṅga. Some scholars would see generic similarity in the reverse types of the two sculptures. The reverse on the Kuṣāṇa Gāmārī Liṅga is viewed as a "pot-bellied Yakṣa"

by R.C. Agrawala who discovered this Liṅga⁸⁷ (Pl. 19.20). It may be compared to the Mukha on the reverse of the late-Kuṣāṇa Dvimukha Liṅga which some consider a gaṇa or a Yakṣa,⁸⁸ although the suggestion that it be considered the female half of an Ardhanārīśvara has, in my opinion, considerable merit (Pl. 19.21). The main heads on the obverse sides of the two sculptures cannot be compared because the head on the Gāmārī Liṅga is too damaged. Nonetheless, it does seem important to register that the greater Mathurā area contained two Liṅgas, one with addorsed Mukhas and one with addorsed full figures. In addition, there is a third Liṅga with addorsed forms. There is the Mathurā Ardhanārīśvara full figure fronting a Liṅga which has a terrific face in the back.⁸⁹ In effect, this piece (now in the Victoria & Albert Museum) is composed of addorsed entities which might be represented at different stages of unfolding from the Liṅga. There are no textual references to assist with an interpretation of a Dvimukha śaiva divinity. My working hypothesis is that a form conjoint with the Liṅga symbolizes that the form projects from the Liṅga. Ritual practice in South Indian temples dedicated to Ardhanārīśvara and described by Adiceam, clearly indicates that the Liṅga has the potentiality to give rise to Ardhanārīśvara, after having been properly anointed.⁹⁰ This detail coincides perfectly with śaiva worship described in a South Indian Āgama, the Somaśambhupaddhati; the arising of the material body of god from the Liṅga occurs after the *abhiṣekha*.⁹¹

Eight-headed śaiva forms, though falling outside the chronological scope of this work, ought to be considered here as their significance provides textual corroboration for interpretations given Kuṣāṇa śaiva and vaiṣṇava sculptures. The eight-headed forms consist of two Aṣṭamukha Liṅgas and one eight-headed full figure. One Aṣṭamukha Liṅga dates to the sixth century A.D.; it comes from West Bengal and is now in the Burdwan Museum (Pl. 19.22). It features four Mukhas facing the quadrants and four additional Mukhas facing the *upadiśas*. The other example comes from Mandasor, M.P. and dates to the late Gupta period. It has four Mukhas facing the quadrants in the middle of the Liṅga, and, an additional set of four Mukhas appear at the base. The eight-headed full figure comes from Māṇḍhal (Nagpur) and has been dated c. fourth/fifth century A.D.⁹² (Pl. 19.23). The heads of this two-armed figure are arranged in an unusual fashion; however, collectively they show the conventional Mukhas of the Kuṣāṇa Caturmukha Liṅga. The image is four-headed, each head facing in one of the quadrants. The head in the back (Pl. 19.24), with its third eye and moustache, resembles the Aghora head, but probably cannot be identified as such because Aghora occupies the Southern, not the Western position. The remaining three, with hair combed back and kept in place by a fillet around the forehead, could be the tranquil (*saumya*) heads. On the front of each thigh is an

⁸⁷ "Newly Discovered Śiva Liṅga from Gāmārī", *Journal of the Bihar Research Society*, 59, Pts. 1-4, 1973, 62-64.

⁸⁸ See Kreisel, *Śiva-Bildwerke*, p. 210 and previous literature listed there.

⁸⁹ See Kreisel, *Śiva-Bildwerke*, Figs. 114a-b.

⁹⁰ M.E. Adiceam, "Les images de Śiva dans l'Inde du Sud VI. Ardhanārīśvara", *Arts Asiatiques*, 17, 1968, 163.

⁹¹ See D.M. Srinivasan, "Transcendancy to Materiality", esp. 139.

⁹² Joshi, "Early Forms", p. 53.

Uṣṇīṣin head. A shaven head, representing the Yogīn aspect, occurs on the upper left arm. (The right arm with its opposing Mukha is now lost.) The Nīlamata Purāṇa, a Kaśmīri Purāṇa that may have been composed in the sixth or seventh century A.D., speaks of the eight constituents comprising Maheśvara. This text praises Maheśvara as the creator and destroyer of the universe in his eightfold “bodies” (*tanū-s*).⁹³ These bodies include: the sacrificer, the earth, air, water, fire, the moon, the sun and the winds. The eight elements which this text associates with Maheśvara reflect the Sāṃkhya position that eight cosmic elements constitute the basic elements for the production of life. This Purāṇa, containing Sāṃkhya influences, views Maheśvara in his eightfold bodies as identical with the full set of cosmic elements. In the system of Sāṃkhya that means that Maheśvara is identical to Primordial Matter, called Prakṛti. This identification can be found in other Purāṇas as well. The Liṅga and Kurma Purāṇas associate eight names of the god with the fundamental elements of the material world. The Liṅga Purāṇa specifies a correspondence between the eight bodies of the lord and the materials constituting the empirical world.⁹⁴ Here too, god Śiva in his eightfold bodies represents Materiality prior to its differentiation during creation. The coordination of eight cosmic elements with eight *śaiva* names has a history going back to the Kauṣītaki Brāhmaṇa. Although the names and elements do not completely tally in the early and later references, the general intent for establishing coordinates changes little. In the Brāhmaṇa legend, the great god (*mahāndeva*) of eight names and eight parts is the immortal, immeasurable foundation of the universe.⁹⁵ The textual tradition therefore supports the view that an eightfold *śaiva* god represents Materiality or Nature (Prakṛti) prior to creation of the world. The Māṇḍhāt icon could represent Śiva Aṣṭamūrti, that is, the cosmic creator composed of all the material constituents and, as such, the embodiment of Nature or Materiality. In consequence, an Aṣṭamukha Liṅga could represent the initial emergence of the eight bodies of god representing Material Nature. The manner in which the aṣṭamukhas are arranged on both the Liṅgas indicates that they are considered the doubling of caturmukhas, just as “eight” in the language of numbers is considered the doubling (i.e. intensification) of “four”. The meaning of the number “eight” harmonizes with the textual evidence given above. “Eight” signifies the inclusion of all phenomenal properties and localities and the surpassing of their boundaries.⁹⁶ “Eight” is therefore a cosmic number referring to the sum total of cosmic space and matter. Theologically, Aṣṭamūrti Śiva, whether in the process of unfolding or fully manifest, should represent god as Empirical Reality. It is immediately apparent that this definition of Eightfold Śiva has much in common with the definition of Eightfold Viṣṇu. Specifically, the latter has been understood to represent Eightfold Material Nature, called Aṣṭadhā Prakṛti; the Bhagavad Gītā (7.4), posits a form of god lower than his transcendental nature and this lower form can be equated with the eight material constituents.⁹⁷ One category of eight-armed Viṣṇu icons noticed in the

⁹³ See Chapter 11.C, p. 152.

⁹⁴ See Chapter 11.C, p. 152; see Joshi, “Early Forms”, p. 54 for a convenient chart.

⁹⁵ Chapter 7, p. 76 contains the legend.

⁹⁶ See Chapter 12, pp. 168–170.

⁹⁷ See Chapter 11.B, p. 141.

early art is an expression of this lower form and has been identified as an Aṣṭadhā Prakṛti image (Pl. 18.15). The likelihood that Śaivism may concretize, in the late and post-Gupta periods, an eightfold form representing a similar notion can be anticipated from a passage in the Mahābhārata: the epic connects the concept of an Eightfold Prakṛti with the nature of Śiva that is lower than his transcendental nature. There remains one observation worthy of comment. It is that according to the above interpretations, both eight-headedness and eight-arms appear to symbolize very similar concepts. It is to be expected that the language of "eight" would not change when used with different gods or different limbs. Indeed, that has been one of the guiding principles throughout this work. However, are we also to believe that "arms" and "heads" are symbolic equivalents, and remain so even when multiplied? It would seem unlikely although there really are no guideposts to provide assistance. Perhaps choice of limb depends on several factors. The rationale behind the multiplication of "heads" to express Śiva as Material Nature is not too difficult to deduce. Given that the Purāṇas cited above consider eight bodied Śiva as representing the Primordial Matter and given that there exists belief in the gradual unfolding of Śiva's manifested form, it is easy to see that the eight-bodied form of Śiva would begin to unfold as an Aṣṭamukha Liṅga. No such theological considerations govern an image of Viṣṇu Aṣṭadhā Prakṛti. In general, an early *vaiṣṇava* image is more prone to multiply arms than any other limb. (The Caturvyūha image is the only image that may multiply the head; but as pointed out above, there are three ways to represent this doctrine in the early art and only one of them multiplies the head.) Just why this is so, again, is uncertain. Possibly the pull of the Vīra tradition within Vaiṣṇavism promoted readiness to multiply the limbs of action more than another bodily part. But the dangers in attempting to find rules during the germinal period in Hindu iconography can be illustrated by the Parel Śiva Aṣṭamūrti which multiplies the arms. Here the critical factor is that the artist multiplied the arms to convey, by means of mythological arithmetic, eightfold Śiva (see Chapter 11 and Pl. 11.4).

The above interpretations of *śaiva* icons with the multiplicity convention concentrate on a specific selection of Ekamukhas, Dvimukha, Caturmukhas and Aṣṭamukhas. The selection contains all the variables occurring in *śaiva* art from earliest times through the Kuṣāṇa period, and, in some cases, beyond. These interpretations can serve as modules from which other interpretations of Kuṣāṇa and post-Kuṣāṇa *śaiva* art can be generated.⁹⁸

⁹⁸ For example, it should be clear from the foregoing that interpretations must differ for a four-armed Natesā (such as the Gupta Nachna Kuthara image), a six-armed Natesā (such as the sixth century Rajgir image) and the eight-armed Natarāja (such as the sixth century image from Elephanta) because the number of arms differ.

CHAPTER TWENTY

THE ENIGMA OF THE MULTI-ARMED WARRIOR GODDESS

There is nothing to prepare us for the extraordinary popularity of the Warrior Goddess in Kuṣāṇa art. At present, thirty-eight icons of the Goddess can be counted from Mathurā alone. More representations, some pressed out of a mould, are found in North Central India. In none of the images is she represented with another deity. This is a rather different situation from the numerous images of Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa, the other popular sectarian god in the art of Mathurā. His images amount to about thirty-five when single images and his depiction with other gods are counted together. There is also nothing to prepare us for the way the Goddess is represented. Two distinct types can be isolated: either (1) she stands straight, without her adversary, but sometimes with the lion couched beneath her feet (Pl. 20.1), or, (2) she stands with her weight on her right straight leg and the weight of the buffalo on her left bent leg, while her arms do battle with him (Pl. 20.2). In both, she never has more than one head and she is almost always depicted with multiple arms ranging from four to six to eight, in number. It is usual to call the Goddess, whose adversary is the great Buffalo Asura, Mahiṣāsūramardīnī, but there is scant reference to such a title in texts, inscriptions or coin legends in the periods prior to, or contemporaneous with, her appearance in Kuṣāṇa art. It is accurate to state that Mahiṣāsūramardīnī is unknown in early Indian numismatics and in Vedic texts. Not until the Durgāstotra, of the Mahābhārata's Virāṭa Parvan, which seems to be a later interpolation, do we hear of the title *mahiṣāsūranāśinī* (Destroyer of the Asura Mahiṣa) given to Durgā. In this stotra, which does not occur in the southern recension of the epic, the Goddess is described with four arms and four faces (*caturbhujā caturvaktre*). She is further delineated as being crowned (*mukuta*) and holding a sword and club (*khadga khetakadhāriṇīm*). These descriptions in the stotra and other details regarding ornamentation leave no doubt that the specifications could well be linked to some images of the Goddess, but they could not have been Kuṣāṇa images for those images that remain from that period do not fit the description of Durgā Mahiṣāsūranāśinī. So we are left with the sudden and frequent appearance, in stone and terracotta, of a combative Goddess whose literary traces are not evident. Since there are no records, to date, which name the Kuṣāṇa Goddess, I find it best to avoid an epithet known from later ages. I call her the Warrior Goddess for that is how she impresses the viewer in her two distinctive iconic types.

The critical apparatus employed for understanding both the arising and significance of *śaiva* and *vaiṣṇava* images with the multiplicity convention will not work for the Warrior Goddess. There can be no assistance from ritual practices or paraphernalia to help us understand why she came to look the way she does or how the iconographical units employed in her imagery came to be assembled. To search for religious influences or artistic modes of expression along routes of pilgrimage makes little sense in the case of a

Goddess seemingly bereft of roots in Brahmanism as well as Buddhism and Jainism. In Mathurā, the region of her iconic concentration and probable artistic origin, no early folk myths or legends have left reference to a goddess battling a buffalo. No backward glance need be cast in the direction of Yakṣa worship in the Vedas and subsequent Yakṣa imagery in order to search for possible "Vīra" antecedents to a Warrior Goddess. Neither is the pregnant fullness of Puruṣa-Prajāpati a significant model on which to explain, via biological analogies, the reason for her multiple arms. Perhaps a symbolism for the numbers and arms of the Warrior Goddess can be found, but not until a context can be established for the adoption of indigenous modules into her iconography and a reason for their adoption.

It does not help matters that the first full account of the battle between the Goddess and the Buffalo Demon fails to tally with the scene on Kuṣāṇa reliefs. It is well known that this account occurs in the Devī-Māhātmya which is said to be added to the Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa by the sixth century A.D.¹ It will be useful to provide an abbreviated version of the encounter if only to demonstrate the divergence between Purāṇic myth and the Kuṣāṇa representations:

The gods (Devas) and demons (Asuras) contended and the divine army was defeated by the more powerful army of Asuras (see 2.1–2). Mahiṣa, the leader of the Asuras, had turned all the gods out of heaven leaving them to find a new defender. That defender appeared as a goddess, born a matchless light from the bodies of the gods. Each god produced a part of her body and each gave her his own special weapon (cf. 2.13–27). Śiva gave his śūla, Viṣṇu his cakṛa, Varuṇa a conch, Agni a śakti, Vāyu a bow and two quivers full of arrows, Indra his vajra and a bell, Yama a rod (daṇḍa), Varuṇa a noose, Kāla a sword and shield etc. (cf. 2.19–26). Decked in garments she was adorned with the cūḍāmaṇi jewel, earrings, bracelets, the crescent moon, armlets, anklets, necklaces and rings (2.24–26); the lion was given to her as vāhana (2.29). Arrayed thus in splendour, the three-eyed (2.16; 3.18) multi-armed² goddess entered the battle. In a moment she destroyed the vast army of the Asuras. Then she took on Mahiṣāsura. She bound him with her noose, whereupon he suddenly became a lion. She cut off his head, whereupon he appeared in human form, then elephant form and lastly resumed his buffalo form. Now the goddess leaped upward, landed on the demon, pressed his neck with her foot and struck him with her spear (śūla). Finally, with her great sword (*mahasi*) she cut off his human head which had issued from the mouth of the buffalo (see 3.28–39).

Whereas all the Kuṣāṇa images of the Goddess with the buffalo concentrate on the moment of her victory over the Asura, none replicate the description in the Devī-Mahātmya, or come close to it. The small Kuṣāṇa stone relief mentioned at the outset (Pl. 20.2) is typical of the grip by which the Goddess achieves victory. Instead of pressing the buffalo's neck with her foot, she squeezes his neck with her left natural arm while the right natural arm presses down on his spine. Her feet balance the demon as it were, so that he

¹ D.C. Sircar, *Studies in the Religious Life of Ancient and Medieval India*, Delhi, 1971, p. 233. Sircar uses the dating of Winternitz, *A History of Indian Literature*, II, pp. 560, 565.

² *Bhujasahasra* (i.e. "thousand arms"), can be understood in the sense of "innumerable arms" rather than the exact number of "a thousand". See Chapter 2, fn. 8.

cannot break her deadly grip. Instead of spear and sword slaying Mahiṣa, a sword and a triśūla are held aloft in the Goddess's extra arms. They do not touch the buffalo. The general appearance of the Goddess is closer to the spirit of the text. Decked in a dhotī, secured by a mekhalā, she is abundantly adorned with earrings, bracelets, armlets and anklets. She is multi-armed, though less than the number she would need to accommodate the at least fourteen weapons and additional attributes mentioned in the text. Her lion, though present, does not appear like a vāhana, and, she does not have a third eye. These differences, and the divergencies in the manner in which the Goddess destroys Mahiṣa, show the degree to which text and image part company.

Quite a number of recent studies³ have given careful attention to the stages by which the Kuṣāṇa images develop into those Gupta representations that begin to approximate the combat scene described in the Devī Māhātmya. G. von Mitterwallner traces the steps by which the animal is killed by wrestling and strangulation in Kuṣāṇa depictions, to its being slaughtered by weapons, especially the long-shafted triśūla, in Gupta art. Härtel, with the aid of stratigraphic findings from Sonkh sets up a chronological sequence to account for the introduction of a triśūla-like weapon into the iconography of the Warrior Goddess. The sequence of the Goddess battling the buffalo (my Type 2), may begin with an image of the Goddess in a pre-Kuṣāṇa level at Sonkh, if the small terracotta (Pl. 20.3) dated to the early Kṣatrapa period, is considered to be a representation of her. In the Sonkh terracotta fragment from Level 21, dating to Kanīṣka I, there can be little doubt that she is represented. Despite breakages, it is still possible to see that the six-armed Goddess grips the buffalo tightly with her natural arms (Pl. 20.4). The two extra arms on the right are heavily banded. The uppermost hand holds a wreath⁴ above the head; the intertwined leaves of the wreath are perfunctorily indicated by crosshatchings. (Were the corresponding left arm in tact, it would be holding the other end of the wreath). The other raised arm holds a small sword or spear, away from the buffalo demon. From Level 16, dating to the time of Vāsudeva I comes a terracotta depicting the buffalo held captive in the "Kuṣāṇa grip" by the four-armed Goddess, whose extra arms are raised overhead, clasping a short-shafted, triśūla-like weapon downward in the direction of the animal (Pl. 20.5). Härtel cites a recently acquired eight-armed fragmentary stone image of the Warrior Goddess in The Museum für Indische Kunst Berlin as further evidence that a downward pointing pronged weapon is a late Kuṣāṇa development (Pl. 20.19).⁵

³ The main ones are: Herbert Härtel, "Early Durgā Mahiṣasuramardini Images", *Eastern Approaches* (full ref. in fn. 67). Gritli von Mitterwallner, "The Kuṣāṇa Type of the Goddess Mahiṣasuramardini as Compared to the Gupta and Mediaeval Types" in *German Scholars on India*, Bombay, 1976, pp. 196-213. See these publications for bibliographies. Cf. the recent works of P. Pal, "Some Mathurā Sculptures of the Kushan Period", *Annali*, Vol. 45, 1985, 635-637. H. von Stietencron, "Die Göttin Durgā Mahiṣasuramardini", *Visible Religion*, 1983; 118ff.

⁴ This object, which has long puzzled scholars, was correctly viewed by J. Harle ("On a Disputed Element in the Iconography of Early Mahiṣasuramardini Images", *Ars Orientalis* VIII, 1970, 147-153), as some sort of garland. This identification has been accepted by von Mitterwallner, "Mahiṣasuramardini", p. 198. For reason given below, I believe this object is a wreath. This is also the opinion of O. Divakaran, "Durgā the Great Goddess: Meanings and Forms in the Early Period", in *Discourses on Śiva*, ed. by Michael W. Meister, Philadelphia, 1984; p. 286 and Pl. 251.

⁵ H. Härtel, "Mahiṣasuramardini".

The sculpture, from Mathurā, shows the Goddess wielding a double three-pronged weapon. Härtel reads this attribute as a vajra and notes that one set of prongs point downward toward the demonic buffalo. However, downward menacing weapons, once introduced, do not remain in all subsequent Kuṣāṇa representations of the Goddess conquering the buffalo. A small Mathura stone sculpture of the late Kuṣāṇa period shows the trident raised upward while victory continues to be achieved by strangulation (Pl. 20.6). The Goddess's necklace compares well with the one worn by the Mathurā Yakṣa from Maholi, dated to c. the third century A.D.⁶ Also the shape of the Goddess's eyes are similar to those of the Yakṣa. The softer, rounder form of this six-armed Goddess and her undulating wavy hair also compare with two other depictions of the warring Goddess assigned to the late Kuṣāṇa period.⁷ The wreath she holds above her head displays more modulated forms. She continues to wear many adornments, including a hair ornament.⁸ Vacillations in the way the moment of victory is depicted seems to be the norm, and a stable correlation between images of the Warrior Goddess and the Devī-Māhātmya must wait until after the Kuṣāṇa period.

A new formula for the moment of victory is worked out at the Caves of Udayagiri (M.P., dated circa 401/402 A.D.); it supplants the "Kuṣāṇa grip" and lasts for several centuries in Central India, Western India and along the Western coast of the subcontinent.⁹ On the left side of the entrance to Cave 6 a very different pose for both Goddess and buffalo is evident. Now the victim's head is pressed to the ground by the right foot of the Goddess as she raises his inert body by the hind legs.¹⁰ Poised on the head of the buffalo, the twelve-armed Goddess thrusts the long-handle trisūla into his side with her main right hand.¹¹ The other weapons she brandishes at this moment of triumph include a bell, an arrow, the sword, the cakra, the bow and a club (the rod?). It has taken about 400 years for an image to develop which bears resemblance to a textual description of the legend.¹² In the interim there can be counted thirty-eight Kuṣāṇa images from Mathurā, one from the area of Agra, one seemingly from Mathurā found in Haryana, plus a

⁶ See Joanna G. Williams, *The Art of Gupta India*, Princeton, 1982, Fig. 5.

⁷ See below on discussion of Pls. 20.16 and 18.

⁸ Cf. her hair ornament with the ornament of Sūrya in the hair of a Mathurā damsel. See J.M. Rosenfield, *The Dynastic Arts of the Kushans*, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1967; Fig. 18.

⁹ See details in von Mitterwallner, "Mahiṣāsūramardini", pp. 199–203; Figs. 4–6.

¹⁰ A fragment of a terracotta plaque from the third century A.D. Sātavahana site of Sannati has been considered as "Durgā standing on the severed head of the buffalo". See Gary Michael Tartakov and Vidya Dehejia, "Sharing, Intrusion, and Influence: The Mahiṣāsūramardini Imagery of the Calukyas and Pallavas", *Artibus Asiae*, 1984, Fig. 27. I am reluctant to accept this identification because the fragment is broken above the knee of the figure and because the basis for a religious context for either Durgā or Mahiṣāsūramardini in South India in the third century A.D. has not been specified.

¹¹ On the basis of the pose of the Goddess and the depiction of the long handle shown on the Amreli terracottas of the Warrior Goddess, I would date them to the Gupta period and not to the Kuṣāṇa period as has been done by S.R. Rao, *Excavations at Amreli*, *Bulletin* Vol. XVIII, Museum & Picture Gallery, Baroda, 1966; Pl. XXX.3, 9; pp. 94, 98.

¹² See also Sircar, *Religious Life*, pp. 229ff. Sircar discusses the episode of the Devī as destroyer of Mahiṣa in the Skanda Purāṇa, the Vāmana, Agni and Matsya Purāṇas and the Devībhāgavata. In each account, it is by weaponry, not physical strength, that Mahiṣa is destroyed. Further, several attributes depicted in Kuṣāṇa art (see below) are not prominent in these accounts.

number of mould-made images that resemble these Kuṣāṇa reliefs but were found in Gupta levels at Ahichchhatra.¹³ The images are both large and small representations of Types 1 and 2. Their iconographic vocabulary is stable, well-defined, without experimental precursors, and without any known records or legends pertaining to the myth(s) or the cult of a Warrior Goddess. That is the first enigma.

The obvious question is "Where did the notion and iconography of the multi-armed Warrior Goddess come from?" One way, perhaps the only way, to approach the question is to analyze the iconographic units and stylistic idiosyncrasies in her imagery and see if they lead to any answers. The two types, cited at the outset, are considered according to a division based on the number of arms of the Goddess. That iconographic convention is, after all, our main concern. As stated above, Kuṣāṇa representations of the Warrior Goddess, who is usually without a nimbus, can be shown with four, six, or eight arms. To date there is one relief known for a long time, but only recently declared to be a two-armed version which was later reworked into a four-armed version.¹⁴ It is the image representative of Type 1 (Pl. 20.1) and now is the time to indicate how this Type can be recognized. The warrior aspect is indicated by the depiction of weaponry, principally the trident, as attribute. The lion may be present and his presence is considered to underscore her warlike character. These two elements are seen in the image now housed in the Berlin Museum of Indian Art. Dr. Härtel, whose painstaking inspection of the piece revealed that originally the Goddess was two-armed, is of the opinion that the trident is also the result of a reworking and that originally the figure held a fly-whisk.¹⁵ A sword and shield are associated with the third and fourth arms which were added later, according to Härtel. Most of the reliefs of the Warrior Goddess, including the Berlin piece from Mathurā, are small (Pl. 20.1 is 27.5 cm. ht.). The Berlin Warrior Goddess, dated to circa second century A.D., typifies the stance and carriage of Type 1: she has no bends in the body, and stands proud, erect, in the samapāda pose; the legs are slightly apart; the right natural hand is in *abhaya* and the left is at the hip (with or without attribute). Perhaps it does not hurt to mention once more that the buffalo appears in Type 2 but not in Type 1.

¹³ V.S. Agrawala, "Terracotta Figurines of Ahichchhatra, Dist. Bareilly, U.P." *Ancient India*, No. 4, 1947-48; 133-134.

¹⁴ The other two-armed Kuṣāṇa representations of the Goddess known to me probably portray her ascetic nature. The first (National Museum, Delhi No. 67.38; Pl. 20.7) shows the Goddess standing and flanked by two (ritual?) vessels. She holds a long-stemmed flower in her left hand and gestures in *abhaya* with the right. In the second, she stands between two flames, probably rising from an altar (Mathura Museum No. 978; Pl. 20.8). This Goddess may be the forerunner of the form of the Goddess of asceticism and ritual purity depicted in the Gupta and post-Gupta periods (see O. Divakaran, "Durgā", pp. 282-284 and Pls. 243, 244; cf. P. Pal, *The Ideal Image*, The Asia Society, New York, 1978, Fig. 46. For the two-armed Goddess represented in Umāsahitamūrtis, see G. Kreisel, *Śiva-Bildwerke*, Pls. 102, 104-8, A 24.

¹⁵ But the same curve in the handle of the trident can be noticed elsewhere and need not represent a reworking of the stone. See *Medieval Sculpture from Eastern India. Selections from the Nalin Collection*. Ed. by Jane Anne Casey, Livingston, 1985. Pl. 1, a seventh century (Bihar?) image.

A

Four-Armed Images of the Warrior Goddess – Type 2

To date, 12 Kuṣāṇa images, from Mathurā, are known to me.¹⁶ An additional five terracottas of the four-armed variety come from levels at Ahichchhatra that can be called Gupta (St. IIIc; 450–550 A.D.), and Post-Gupta (St. IIb; 550–650 A.D.). All these terracottas are mould-made and look like the Kuṣāṇa images from Mathurā.¹⁷ The small stone relief of the four-armed Goddess in the Mathura Museum (Pl. 20.2) has already been described in considerable detail. Two more noteworthy stylistic features now deserve our attention. The head of the buffalo is not rendered in profile, which is the more conventional rendering (cf. Pls. 20.5, 6). In profile, the buffalo's neck is stretched and the head is raised due to the grip and stance of the Goddess (e.g. Pl. 20.12). In the relief shown in Pl. 20.2, and another similar relief (Pl. 20.9 which however omits the lion), the full view of the buffalo's head is seen as if viewed from above. In Pl. 20.2, the battling protagonists are framed by a thin band of equidistant horizontal lines. A similar edging is found on the throne of a Gandhāran sculpture in the collection of the Chandigarh Museum (Pl. 20.10). Here the edging device looks almost like a series of beads. Upon the throne sits a female wearing a wreath. She is a goddess not only because she sits on a throne but also because a rather large nimbus surrounds her head. The goddess, wearing earrings, necklace, bangles and anklets, is attended on either side of the throne by squatting lionesses or jackals.¹⁸

The four-armed Goddess on the Sonkh terracotta (Pl. 20.11; No. So I 137), has an interesting headdress. She seems to wear a fillet having a large central ornament (Cf. Pl. 20.6 and fn. 8).

The unusual hairstyle of the Munich Museum relief of the Warrior Goddess (Pl. 20.12) prompted one scholar to consider it as a corrupt representation of the polos headdress worn by several deities of Hellenic or Hellenistic origin.¹⁹ In another relief from the same Museum, the large knife or scimitar held by the Goddess in the raised right hand forecasts its lethal use described in later literature.²⁰

¹⁶ They are: National Museum, Delhi No. U 91; Mathura Museum Nos. 881, 2317, 65.1; plus one unnumbered from the Mathura Museum; from Sonkh and in the Berlin Museum SOI 226, 137, 143, 214; in the Munich Museum Nos. 199, 200; in the Indian Museum, Calcutta No. A11211/4266.

¹⁷ Agrawala, "Terracotta Figurines", Pl. XLVII, Nos. 120 & 122 can be compared with NMD 66.77; and SOI 166. See also Vijayakanta Mishra, *Mahishamardini*, New Delhi, 1985, Fig. 85 from Ahichchhatra which compares well with Pl. 20.12, plus Mathura Museum Nos. 875; 993 etc. Probably clay moulds were made from stone images.

¹⁸ B.N. Mukherjee, (*Nanā on Lion*, Calcutta, 1969, p. 110; re: Fig. 6.); he opines that the animals could also be dogs. The rationale for jackals is based on Mithraic iconography (see below).

¹⁹ B.N. Mukherjee, "Foreign Elements in Iconography of Mahishāsūramardīnī – The War Goddess of India", *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft*, Supplement VI, 1985, 411. But this same hairstyle is also found in the depiction of the probable ascetic nature of the Devī (Pl. 20.7). A Mathurā artist would probably not associate a prominent foreign element with the Goddess in her ascetic nature. Therefore the style may not be foreign.

²⁰ See von Mitterwallner, "Mahiṣāsūramardīnī", Fig. 2; re: *khadga*; see Sircar, *Religious Life*, p. 234 and fn. 4.

A downward pointing weapon is not only seen on the Sonkh terracotta from Level 16 (i.e. Pl. 20.5). Two other terracotta fragments from Sonkh housed in the Berlin Museum of Indian Art must also be cited. A spear is held downward in the extra right hand of the Goddess seen on Pl. 20.13 (No. So I 226). Another interesting feature of this small piece is that the Goddess holds the buffalo's muzzle; as such it is the precursor to the gesture fully exploited by artists on the wall to the left of the door of Cave 17 at Udayagiri, and on the terracotta plaque from Nagar²¹ also showing the Warrior Goddess. The Goddess on the Sonkh terracotta (Pl. 20.13) is wearing a cap, or helmet with a wide rim and a raised crown having oblique indentations. This unusual headgear bears some resemblance to the helmet she wears on a terracotta from Ahichchhatra and found in a level dating between 650–750 A.D. In the extra raised left hand of the second Sonkh terracotta, a sharp pointed weapon (? dagger) is held downward (Pl. 20.14; No. So I 214).

B

Six-Armed Images of the Warrior Goddess – Type 2

The most common way to represent the Goddess in the Kuṣāṇa period is with six arms. Sixteen examples come from Mathurā.²² One fragment has recently been reported from Sanghel in Gurgaon (Haryana);²³ it is made of red sandstone and looks (on the indifferent photograph) like a Mathurā product. One is reported from St. IIb at Ahichchhatra; it is not mould made.²⁴ Perhaps more Mathurā examples could be counted were not many pieces too fragmented or rubbed to determined accurately the number of arms.²⁵

All but one in this group show the Goddess placing a wreath upon her head with her uppermost raised set of arms. On a terracotta in the Mathura Museum (No. 36.2715, Pl. 20.17), the detailed features of the wreath have remained. It is composed of oblique strips, punctuated with indentations. As such it is a schematized version of the leafy wreaths adorning the hair of ladies in Gandhāran art. Indeed, wreaths made of ribbons or foliage are the principal ornamental headdress of Gandhāran women.²⁶ In a Gandhāran stone sculpture, the rows of intertwining leaves can be rendered with sumptuous care.²⁷ In the Mathurā terracotta (Pl. 20.17), the naturalistic elements may have been reduced to schematization because the material, clay, is more malleable than stone and/or because a clay version perforce may be a cheaper, less accomplished version than one in

²¹ The reasons for dating this plaque after Cave 17 at Udayagiri are best given in von Mitterwallner, "Mahiṣāsūramardini", pp. 202ff.

²² They are: Mathura Museum Nos. 2715, 993, 889, 875, 2037, 2784, 61.8, SOI 166; National Museum, Delhi 66.77, U 51; Ashmolean Museum O.S. 37; Berlin Museum SOI 222 and the terracotta from Level 21 at Sonkh; Private Bombay Coll. [see Fig. 251 in O. Divakaran, "Durgā"]; Los Angeles County Museum of Art No. M 84.153.1; Brooklyn Museum No. 83.172.1.

²³ D.P.S. Punia, "Recently Explored Icons of Mahiṣāsūramardini from South Haryana", *Vishveshwaranand Indological Journal*. Hoshiapur, Vol. XIX, Pts. i–ii, 1981; 237ff.

²⁴ Agrawala, "Ahichchhatra", Pl. XLVII, No. 122.

²⁵ E.g. State Museum, Lucknow No. G 332; Pl. 20.15, where the breakage has lost the evidence.

²⁶ Francine Tissot, *Gandhāra*, Paris 1985, pp. 82–83.

²⁷ See Tissot, *Gandhāra*, Figs. 201–202.

stone. On this basis, it has been proposed that the indifferent crosshatchings seen on the object held overhead by the six-armed Goddess on the terracotta from Level 21 at Sonkh noted above (Pl. 20.4) also represent a wreath with intertwined leaves.²⁸ The martial air of the Warrior Goddess in Pl. 20.17 is enhanced by the belts across her bosom; they resemble the *chhannavīra* worn by fighters and they are characteristically associated with Kārttikeya. She holds a sword or spear in an upper right hand and the trisūla in the corresponding left hand.²⁹ The natural arms, bedecked in bangles, employ the "Kuṣāṇa grip" to the buffalo. The Goddess's dot on the brow, her dhotī with its ample pleating and her large anklets should also be noted.

The only six-armed image I know which does not hold the wreath, holds the sun and moon discs in the uppermost hands (Pl. 20.16). These attributes are held in one other late Kuṣāṇa representation of the Warrior Goddess (Pl. 20.18, see below), making them quite rare in her iconography. Actually, they are generally quite rare in early Indian art. From earliest times through the Kuṣāṇa period, the sun disc and crescent moon can be noticed on two *śaiva* pieces: the Mūsānagar relief (Pl. 17.11), which also, it bears repeating, depicts a small couchant lion, and on the fourth century Rang Mahal terracotta (Pl. 19.11). I would agree with Pal, who first published the six-armed Warrior Goddess seen in Pl. 20.16, that these attributes attest to the cosmic nature of the Goddess (see below).³⁰ Pal dates the image (No. 84.153.1 in the Los Angeles County Museum of Art) to the late Kuṣāṇa period (i.e. third century A.D.).

The fragment found in southern Haryana shows the Goddess's right back hand holding the tail of the buffalo.³¹ This is a late Kuṣāṇa relief and to date one of the few Kuṣāṇa predecessors of that gesture found in Gupta art (e.g. seen on the Udayagiri relief to the left of the door of Cave 17).

C

Eight-Armed Images of the Warrior Goddess – Type 2

The other representation of the sun and moon held by the Warrior Goddess occurs on an eight-armed red sandstone relief (c. 18" ht.) in the collection of the Museum für Indische Kunst, Berlin (No. I 5817; Pl. 20.18). The natural hands of the Goddess grasp the buffalo in the characteristic "Kuṣāṇa grip" and his tongue juts out as if in response to the tight squeeze around his neck.³² The fact that this feature is also found on the six-armed image (Pl. 20.16) and that both reliefs do not show the Goddess with the trident

²⁸ See Tissot, *Gandhāra*, Fig. 200, for the same pattern more carefully rendered.

²⁹ The following six-armed images show one or both of these weapons: Nos. 933, SOI 222, No. 889; SOI 166; The piece in the Bombay Private Collection has a sword in the right and shield in the left hands.

³⁰ P. Pal, "Mathurā Sculptures", 637. Cf. the Garhwa lintel of Viṣṇu Viśvarūpa which has symbols of the sun and moon, see N.P. Joshi, *Catalogue of the Brahmanical Sculptures in the State Museum, Lucknow*, I, Lucknow, 1972; Plate 3 and pp. 85–88.

³¹ Punia, "Mahiṣāsūramardīnī", 239.

³² von Mitterwallner, "Mahiṣāsūramardīnī", considers this an early Gupta feature (pp. 201–202), but when she was writing, both pieces (i.e. Pls. 20.16 & 18), were not yet known.

strongly suggest that these two images share some conceptualization of the Goddess not present in the other images. The other arms of the eight-armed Devī are raised. On the right side, in ascending order, the hands hold a short sword, the sun disc and one end of the wreath, held over her head which is encircled with a headband. The attributes held on the left side are, in descending order, the end of the wreath, the moon disc and the shield. She stands in the characteristic contrapposto pose and rests her feet on the back of addorsed and seated lions. These lions act as visual synecdoches in that they stand for the entire lion throne. The lion throne, so prevalent in ancient Indian religious and royal art,³³ is also seen in the art of other ancient cultures. The Berlin Catalogue entry for this piece draws attention to its iconographic connections with the art of the ancient Near East.³⁴ The Near Eastern Goddesses Nana, Ardoksho and Anāhita can be associated with the lion throne as well as the planetary discs. The entry dates the piece to 300 A.D., which I find slightly too late. On the basis of style, it is difficult to place the figure of the Goddess – still a summation of separate parts – ahead of the late Kuṣāṇa figures of the Goddess seen on Pls. 20.6 and 16, when the latter show more integrated forms. Further, the buffalo with his outstretched tongue is also seen on the late Kuṣāṇa relief (i.e. Pl. 20.16). Therefore I prefer to date the relief to the late Kuṣāṇa period. Another late Kuṣāṇa eight-armed representation is the one where the Goddess wields the vajra-like weapon, already discussed above (Pl. 20.19). This fragment is sixty-nine cms. high, causing Dr. Härtel to observe that the whole sculpture must have originally measured about two meters if not more in height.³⁵ This sculpture, together with another large sculpture of Type 1 of the Warrior Goddess (Pl. 20.22, see below) prove that not all her images are small and that they are not all confined to (presumably) private, domestic worship. The only other eight-armed depiction of Type 2 known to me is in the collection of the Archaeological Survey of India-Agra (Pl. 20.20; No. 56). All the Kuṣāṇa characteristics are evident on this small, heretofore unpublished sandstone relief. The Goddess assumes the contrapposto pose. She presses the buffalo's neck and back with her natural hands. One raised right hand holds his tail aloft; the other holds a small sword or spear. On the left, two other weapons are raised, one of which may be the triśūla. A wreath is held in the uppermost hands. A late Kuṣāṇa date may be in order because of two iconographic factors: the holding of the tail (cf. with the late Kuṣāṇa Haryana relief of the six-armed Goddess, mentioned above), and the appearance of eight arms which seems to be a late Kuṣāṇa feature.

³³ Jeannine Auboyer, *Le Trône et son Symbolisme dans L'Inde ancienne*, Paris, 1949, pp. 108–112. On the lion throne see J.E. van Lohuizen-de Leeuw, *The "Scythian" Period*, Leiden, 1949.

³⁴ *Schätze Indischer Kunst*, Berlin, 1984, p. 49.

³⁵ H. Härtel, "Mahiṣāsūramardini", p. 85.

D

Multi-armed Images of the Warrior Goddess – Type I

A four-armed small relief in the Mathura Museum has the main features characterizing Type I (Pl. 20.21, No. 592). The lion rests behind the feet of the Warrior Goddess who holds, respectively, the spear and trisūla in the extra raised right and left hands. The unusual and attractive feature in this example is the very large nimbus which surrounds the whole upper part of the Goddess, who has the right natural hand poised in the *vyāvṛtta* mudrā. She places her left natural hand on the hip. A very similar representation, broken below the knees is also in the collection of the Mathura Museum (No. 724). A third fragment in the same Museum can be assumed to represent the four-armed Goddess because she carries a large trisūla in the raised left hand (No. 2028). But the relief is broken below the bust and her two right hands are too damaged to determine either the attribute or mudrā. Another fragmentary Warrior Goddess with a trident on her left side, is noteworthy because of the large size. What remains of the relief comprises the upper torso; it measures forty-three cms. in ht. and fifty-five cms. in width (Pl. 20.22). This Warrior Goddess in the Russek Collection (No. 605), together with the above mentioned Berlin eight-armed Goddess (Pl. 20.19) are the two large early images known to date; probably the Russek Goddess is later than the Berlin Goddess since the modeling of the former (especially around the hair region) could push it into the fourth century A.D. Essentially these two images prepare the way for the large tableaux of the Warrior Goddess which appear in the mature Gupta period.

It is provocative to consider the well-known lower portion of the female figure found at Māt in the present context (Pl. 20.23; No. A 214 in the Mathura Museum). The remaining portion shows a couchant lion at the back and at the feet of the standing female (Pl. 20.24); therefore the possibility exists that the statue originally could have represented the Warrior Goddess. The left hand can still be seen resting at the hip, with the folds of the scarf flowing over the wrist (much like the examples in Pls. 20.1, 21 and No. 724, mentioned above).³⁶ What remains of the dress and ornaments on the Māt sculpture also resembles these examples, although they are commonly found on numerous female images. This image comes from the Māt dynastic shrine (*devakula*), where the king and his royal entourage worshipped the deities who protect the king and his family.³⁷ The Kuṣāṇa dynastic shrine at Surkh Kotal gives some indication that a deity associated with "Victory" may have been worshipped in that dynastic shrine.³⁸ The Māt female statue originally of medium size (remaining portion is 13 1/2" in ht.) may have represented the Warrior Goddess as a victory goddess. It is possible, though difficult to prove from presently available evidence, that the Māt female statue originally depicted the Warrior Goddess worshipped as the Goddess of Victory by Kuṣāṇa royalty.

³⁶ The lion, in these examples, faces in the opposite direction from the lion in the Māt example, a variance that may not have great import.

³⁷ Gérard Fussman, "The Māt *devakula*: A New Approach to Its Understanding", in *Mathurā: The Cultural Heritage*, p. 199.

³⁸ Fussman, "Māt *devakula*", 198–199.

A unique six-armed Warrior Goddess of Type 1 stands frontally on the 6" high sandstone relief (Pl. 20.25; Mathura Museum No. 42.2947). The natural right hand is in *abhaya* mudrā and the natural left hand holds a goblet at the hip. The trident is recognizable in her upper left hand.³⁹ Unlike most of the six-armed images of Type 2, this Goddess does not hold the wreath. But, in keeping with other images, she wears a sheer dhotī, a wide girdle and a full array of ornaments.

The general appearance of the Goddess, in both Type 1 and Type 2, certainly reflects the Indian mode and taste. Her garment is typical of the Indian female depicted in the art of Mathurā.⁴⁰ The lightweight dhotī, draping easily over the body, contrasts with the dress of foreign ladies in the art of Mathurā. They initially wear tailored garments of thicker cloth; in time they can wear a combination of lighter and heavier clothes.⁴¹ Also the heavy and plentiful jewelry worn by the Goddess is similar to the typical way in which the Mathurā Yakṣīs are decked. Curiously, the belts which crisscross the bosom of the Goddess (Pl. 20.17), are seen in both Indian and foreign attire. Skanda-Kārttikeya, whose martial nature is depicted on a third century A.D. relief probably from Mathurā, wears the cross-belts, as *chhannavīra*, across his chest.⁴² Even earlier however, a Great Goddess flanked by animals on a temple pendant from Tillya-Tepe (Afghanistan) wears the same sort of straps;⁴³ from the same site comes a gold figurine of a Kuṣāṇa Goddess also wearing the same straps.⁴⁴ This attire, which presumably is a combative attire, alerts us to the fact that the Goddess may display features which can be at home in more than one culture. By far the most indigenous element in the outward appearance of the Goddess may be her multiple arms, which occur in nearly every one of her very many representations. The present study understands the phenomenon of multiple bodily parts to be rooted in a cultural, religious and aesthetic experience that is predominantly Indo-Aryan. The multiple arms of the Goddess give strong indication that there is much in the nature of this deity that relates to indigenous traditions and sensibilities. Yet, there is hardly any solid documentation to support that indication. That is the second enigma.

The problem is not only that writings prior to, or contemporaneous with, the Kuṣāṇa images of the Warrior Goddess do not relate to these Kuṣāṇa images, the problem is also that accounts such as the Durgāstotra and the Devī-Māhātmya that do mention her, do not characterize the Goddess in the way that is most characteristic of her in Kuṣāṇa art. The Devī-Māhātmya attributes to the Goddess a third eye which she does not possess in Kuṣāṇa art. The Durgāstotra attributes to the Warrior Goddess four faces and four arms.

³⁹ The entry card of the Mathura Museum lists the following weapons (clockwise): battle axe; vajra; drum; trident; club.

⁴⁰ Richard Salomon, "Daily Life in Ancient Mathurā", in *Mathurā: The Cultural Heritage*, p. 40.

⁴¹ J.E. van Lohuizen-de Leeuw, "Foreign Elements in Indian Culture Introduced during the Scythian Period with Special Reference to Mathurā", in *Mathurā: The Cultural Heritage*, p. 75.

⁴² Doris Meth Srinivasan, "Iconological Studies of Recent Mathurā Acquisitions in the Bharat Kala Bhavan", *Chhavi* - 2, Rai Krishnadasa Felicitation Volume, Bharat Kala Bhavan, 1981, pp. 99-101; Figs. 292 & 293.

⁴³ Victor Sarianidi, *The Golden Horde of Bactria, From the Tillya-Tepe Excavations in Northern Afghanistan*, New York, 1985; see Nos. 48 & 49.

⁴⁴ Sarianidi, *Golden Horde*, No. 80.

The Kuṣāṇa Warrior Goddess does not have four faces, and, four arms is not her characteristic number of multiple arms. Six is. And that is extremely problematic.

No other divinity has six arms in the art of Mathurā nor in the art of any other pre-Gupta school of art in India.⁴⁵ From the Gandhāran area, two examples come to mind. The first is the six-armed, three-headed Śiva depicted on the Akhun Dheri relief, but it dates to a time after the period of the Great Kuṣāṇas.⁴⁶ The second is a divinity on a Gandhāran relief from Butkara I, Swat.⁴⁷ This relief, though poorly preserved, still shows the outline of a deity's hat. It is composed of a wide rim and a crown which is narrower at the top than on the bottom. The shape of this headgear is thus quite similar to the one worn by the Goddess on the Sonkh terracotta (Pl. 20.13), and it may, like the Sonkh headgear, be a helmet. Further, the six-armed divinity from Butkara I holds a disc in one of the raised left hands; it reminds of the planetary discs that occur in two reliefs of the Warrior Goddess (Pls. 20.16 & 18).

It is not merely that six arms are unheard of with other deities pictured in the Doab, it is also that the language of "six" distinguishes itself from the language of those other numbers employed with multiple bodily parts. In the Vedic corpus and in the epic passages, "six" hardly ever designates divine multiple bodily parts. Vedic occurrences of double triads (e.g. Aitareya Brāhmaṇa 4, 28.6; Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa 4,2,3,6) are also not associated with divine multiple bodily parts.⁴⁸ Vedic occurrences of "six" deal mainly with "six eyes". The three-headed Rig Vedic demon Viśvarūpa has six eyes (RV 10.99.6). Here "six-eyes" is devoid of cosmic significance. Obviously, the three-headed demon has two eyes in each head. This usage of "six" in fact discloses what appears to be the characteristic usage of "six". "Six" is used as a mathematical, not a symbolic, number. The latter category contains numbers frequently used to multiply divine bodily parts. The numbers "four", "five", "eight", and to some degree "three", are symbolic numbers in that they can have symbolic value. Symbolic values predominate over mathematical values when these numbers multiply bodily parts. The symbolism of these numbers is allied to their being formulated according to certain theoretical considerations. According to the theory on "number formation" already discussed at length,⁴⁹ "three" and "four" can be considered "real numbers" in ancient cultures because things consisting of three and four parts can be perceived at a glance. "Five" and "eight" are formulated on the basis of their relation to the last "real number", namely "four". "Eight" is the doubling of "four" and that factor influences its symbolic value. "Five" occurs by the $x + 1$ formula, where the totality of a thing (i.e. "one") is added to the number of parts of the

⁴⁵ In the Gupta period, six arms is still unusual, but two examples can be cited. One is from Garhwa (*supra*) and the other is from Deogarh. See also Chapter 12, p. 162. The Gupta terracotta showing a six-armed deity in a chariot is problematic and not included in the count (Amy G. Poster, *From Indian Earth*, The Brooklyn Museum, 1986; No. 96).

⁴⁶ See Chapter 19, p. 267.

⁴⁷ R.C. Agrawala - M. Taddei, "An Interesting Relief from the Swat Valley" *East and West* XVI, 1966, pp. 82-88.

⁴⁸ Jan Gonda, *Triads in the Veda*, in *Verhandelingen der Koninklijke Nederlandse Akademie van Wetenschappen, Afd.; Letterkunde Nieuwe Reeks*, Deel 91, Amsterdam, Oxford, New York, 1976, p. 33.

⁴⁹ See Chapters 6, p. 71; 12, pp. 171-172.

thing (i.e. "x"); in the case of "five" obviously the "x" is a thing consisting of "four" parts. "Six" does not seem to be related to these theoretical considerations regarding number formation. It is neither a "real number", nor is it a number that seems to be attained on the " $x + 1$ " formula.⁵⁰ Also it is not a number that is frequently cited in the Brāhmaṇic texts. Its occurrence in the later gr̥hyasūtras again highlights its mathematical usage. "Six" can refer to the directions when the zenith and nadir are added unto the four terrestrial directions.⁵¹ "Six", in contradistinction to "three", "four", "five" and "eight" seems to be used predominantly as a mathematical number; it is a number with no apparent symbolic implication and with no apparent textual usage to denote divine multiple bodily parts.

A Warrior Goddess whose characteristic number of multiple arms are six, raises expectations that her imagery is founded upon concepts significantly different than those governing the śaivite and vaiṣṇavite images considered in previous chapters. Indeed, much of the iconography of the Warrior Goddess reflects foreign sources, and this is taken up next.⁵²

The fact that the wreath is an ornament worn by foreign ladies has already been introduced. Indian women, in the art of Mathurā, wear their hair in a wide variety of styles some of which include the addition of bejewelled decorations;⁵³ they do not, however, wear wreaths on their heads. Foreign women usually do wear some sort of wreath, "a fashion probably copied from the Hellenistic West".⁵⁴ The Goddess Nana can appear on Kuṣāṇa coins holding a wreath in her hand, or wearing one. Nana, an ancient Mesopotamian goddess, came to be worshipped beyond the Near East. Her cult spread to the West and it spread to the East, into regions that were occupied by the Śakas and the Kuṣāṇas. She appears in a long gown and encircled with a nimbus, on the coins of Kaniṣka I, Huviṣka, Vāsudeva I and the later Kaniṣka. On these coins she can wear a moon crescent on a diadem in her hair. A scepter may be seen in her right hand, a small box in her left.⁵⁵ Sometimes she carries an investiture wreath in her hand.⁵⁶ An example of Nana wearing a wreath in her hair comes from her sanctuary at Dura-Europos, dated to the second or third century A.D. A bust of Nana depicted on the side of a patera in her sanctuary "shows her wearing a bejewelled crown and encircled by a laurel wreath which identify her as a goddess of fecundity and war".⁵⁷ A wreath is also worn by the goddess seated on the throne flanked by lionesses or jackals in the aforementioned Gandhāran relief (Pl. 20.10). The act of crowning oneself – as the Warrior

⁵⁰ It mythopoeically illogical to formulate " $5 + 1$ "; see Chapter 12.

⁵¹ Jan Gonda, *Vedic Ritual, The Non-Solemn Rites*, Leiden-Köln, 1980, p. 37.

⁵² Discussion on the foreign elements in the iconography of this deity has been ably initiated by B.N. Mukherjee in the two publications cited in fns. 18 & 19.

⁵³ Cf. Salomon, "Daily Life", p. 40. Cf. S.P. Gupta, ed. *Kuṣāṇa Sculptures from Sanghol*, vol. I, New Delhi 1985, e.g. p. 44, Fig. 5.7; Pls. 4, 12, 17, 22.

⁵⁴ van Lohuizen-de Leeuw, "Foreign Elements", p. 76.

⁵⁵ Robert Göbl, *System und Chronologie der Münzprägung des Kuṣāṇreiches*, Wien 1984, p. 43, Nos. 1, 3, 4.

⁵⁶ Göbl, *Münzprägung*, p. 43, No. 7 (S. 899); No. 8 (S. 660).

⁵⁷ G. Azarpay, "Nanā, The Sumero-Akkadian Goddess of Transoxiana", *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 96.4, 1976, 537.

Goddess does with the wreath in her uppermost hands – is also depicted on Indo-Greek and Śaka coinage. On the round tetradrachme of Demetrius I, Heracles is depicted in the act of self-coronation.⁵⁸ A bronze square coin type of Azes has Heracles on the obverse; he crowns himself with the right hand. In the left he holds a club and a lion's skin.⁵⁹ Heracles is shown with the same gesture and attributes on a bronze square coin type of Azilises.⁶⁰

By no means is the bestowal and wearing of a wreath unknown in Brāhmaṇic literature. A delightful story in the Taittirīya Brāhmaṇa makes it clear that a wreath confers superiority on the warrior god, Indra. He is called "the eldest son", of Prajāpati (TB 1.5.9.1). The myth relates how Indra achieves the status of his father. The story can be summarized in Hopkins words: "Though Prajāpati created all creatures, they would not 'stand for' his superiority. But he extracted the essence of the four quarters of the world and of all creatures and made thereof a wreath. And when he had put this wreath upon himself they acknowledged his superiority. But he desired that Indra should be the best among his children and he put the wreath upon him. Then all creatures acknowledged Indra's superiority, seeing upon him that wonder-work which they were wont to see upon the father". (16.4.1–3).⁶¹ Another passage from the same Brāhmaṇa mentions a lotus-wreath to be worn by the sacrificer; it may symbolize, according Hopkins, both the year and the power of Vṛtra, the demon killed by the warrior god, Indra.⁶²

Culling together the symbolism of the wreath from Brāhmaṇic sources (i.e. supremacy, the year, power of the vanquished), and non-Brāhmaṇic sources (i.e. war and fecundity; investiture), the collective connotations harmonize quite well with a Warrior Goddess who defeats a buffalo.⁶³ However, it must be remembered that there is no direct proof to establish that, in fact, the wreath of the Goddess was imbued with connotations stemming from these sources.

The symbols of the sun and the moon, as planetary discs held in the hands of the Warrior Goddess, are also at home in foreign and Brāhmaṇic contexts. Nana is allied to the sun and moon, which on that account, enter into her iconography. Nana takes on the characteristics of the Mesopotamian goddess Ishtar. As such, she appears as the daughter of the Mesopotamian moon-god Sin, and the sister of the sun-god Śamaś. Evidently, the crescent moon Nana wears on her diadem on Kuṣāṇa coinage bespeaks of her lineage. Considerably later, in Sogdian art of the seventh–eighth century A.D., she is depicted

⁵⁸ R. Audouin et P. Bernard, "Trésor de Monnaies Indiennes et Indo-Grecques D'Ai Khanoum (Afghanistan)", *Revue Numismatique* Vol. 16, 1974, 33.

⁵⁹ Percy Gardner, *The Coins of the Greek and Scythic Kings of Bactria and India in the British Museum*, Reprint. New Delhi, 1971, p. 89; Nos. 186 & 187.

⁶⁰ Gardner, *Coins of Greek and Scythic Kings*, p. 96, Nos. 38 & 39; cf. p. 98, Nos. 6 & 7.

⁶¹ E.W. Hopkins, "Gods and Saints of the Great Brāhmaṇas", *Conn. Aca. of Arts & Sciences*, Vol. 15, New Haven, 1909, p. 42.

⁶² Hopkins, "Gods and Saints", pp. 43–44; re: TB 18.9.6. Interestingly, Harle ("Early Mahiṣāsūramardini Images", 152–153), suggests that the object held aloft by the Goddess could be a lotus garland.

⁶³ These symbolic associations of the wreath (with the exception of "power of the vanquished"), are also suitable in the Mathurā sculpture of four-armed Maheśa, standing before the Linga, and placing the wreath upon his head (see Pl. 19.19).

holding the symbols of the sun and the moon in her hands. There is the well-known representation of four-armed Nana on the silver Khwarezmian bowl, which is now in the British Museum. Nana sits upon her lion holding discs of the sun and the moon in extra raised hand.⁶⁴ There is also the portrayal of four-armed Nana on a mural from Ustrushana; again she is seen astride her lion with the planetary symbols in her upper hands.⁶⁵ In the art of Gandhāra, personifications of the sun and moon appear on the Shah-ji-ki-Dheri casket, where they are seen on either side of a personage dressed in the typical Kuṣāṇa attire.⁶⁶ The casket dates to the time of Kaniṣka. In the Doab, the earliest occurrence of the sun and moon symbols is in the depiction of Maheśa from Mūsānagar, in the Mukṭā Devī Temple (U.P.; see Pl. 17.11).

Exactly what the planetary discs mean when held by the Warrior Goddess cannot be stipulated. However, indigenous literary usages again accord well with the depictions in foreign pictorial contexts. Associating the moon with one's lineage, as cited above in the case with Nana, is also prevalent in ancient India. The sun and moon refer to lineage structures in the epics and the purāṇas. But already in the first millennium B.C. tribal identities centered around lineage identification and kṣatriya tribes could belong either to the Sun-Family (Sūryavaṃśa) or the Moon-Family (Candravaṃśa).⁶⁷ The Kuṣāṇas, more than any other early Indian dynasty were concerned with lineage, specifically divine descent. Certainly the importance, if not the divine descent, of the Kuṣāṇa personage standing on the side of the bronze casket from Shah-ji-ki-Dheri is intimated by the presence of the Sun and Moon Gods which surround him. The motif on the casket recalls, according to Rosenfield, Iranian notions associated with divine kingship, and Mesopotamian notions associated with royal triumphs. In addition to lineage, another meaning from fairly early inscriptions and literature can be attributed to "sun and moon". When, for example, the Matsya Purāṇa (106.33), states "By bathing there [i.e. at the Haṃsaprapatana tīrtha], the devotee gets the benefit of Aśvamedha sacrifice and resides in heaven, as long as the sun and the moon shine in the firmament", the text is expressing the meaning "for a very long time".⁶⁸ Inscriptions, too, often end with something akin to "as long as the sun and moon endure". For example, the Hīrahaḍagalli inscription of Śivaskandavarman, dated to the fourth century A.D. contains "as long as there is the moon and the sun (*ācandratāra-kālikam*)."⁶⁹ Another Gupta inscription, this time at Ajanta, in Cave XXVI mentions the sun and the moon in a context suggesting duration for a very long time;⁷⁰ the implication

⁶⁴ See Mukherjee, *Nanā*, Fig. 47.

⁶⁵ See Azarpay, "Nanā", 540; Fig. 5 & fn. 25.

⁶⁶ See Rosenfield, *Dynastic Arts*, Fig. 60a.

⁶⁷ For Śuṅga and Kuṣāṇa depictions of the sun and moon as referents to the lineage of gods who are apotheosized warriors (*kṣatriyas*) see Doris Meth Srinivasan, "Genealogy of the Buddha in Early Indian Art", *Eastern Approaches, Essays on Asian Art and Archaeology*, ed. T.S. Maxwell, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1992, 38–44.

⁶⁸ Such expressions in the purāṇas vaguely signify "forever". (Ludo Rocher, in a personal communication, dated June 25, 1989.)

⁶⁹ This citation was provided by Richard Salomon, whom I thank. The inscription is in D.C. Sircar, *Select Inscriptions I*, p. 464, line 29 and Sanskritized Text, p. 466, line 11.

⁷⁰ Gregory Schopen, "Filial Piety and the Monk in the Practice of Indian Buddhism: A Question of 'Sinicization' Viewed from the Other Side", *T'oung Pao* LXX (1984), 126; fn. 53.

in all these citations is that somethings which lasts as long as the sun and the moon, lasts "continually" or, "forever". Both usages involving "sun and moon", and both meanings (i.e. lineage and very long duration), complement and enhance each other. Both can be applied to the Warrior Goddess who holds the sun and moon symbols. As such, emphasis on the divine origin and endurance of the Goddess are being stressed. (The same meanings, it should be noted, are congenial for the image of Maheśa, Pl. 17.11.)

The close association between the lion and a deity, especially a female deity, again has roots both within and outside, but mainly outside of India. The claim can be made that, in the Vedic period, a deity can be rather closely and regularly connected with a specific animal.⁷¹ In the Vedas, the lion is not associated with any one god in particular, but already in the Rig Veda, such important gods as Indra, Agni and Soma are compared to the lion.⁷² Though gods are compared to animals in the Vedas and can even be closely associated with them, the idea of "a theriomorphic double" enters when the animal is considered a *vāhana*, or vehicle of the godhead.⁷³ The first text to specify that the lion is the vehicle (*simharatha*) of the Goddess is the Harivaṃśa.⁷⁴ The Kuṣāṇa artistic evidence may anticipate the idea in the text by representing a notion that is already present. But we really cannot be sure that the lion is considered the Goddess's *vāhana* in the pre-Gupta period. Of the several instances where the lion appears with the Goddess, it is mainly in Pl. 20.1 that the lion looks like a *vāhana*. Perhaps one ought to go no further than to state that the lion's aggressiveness and combativeness could account for his accompanying the Goddess so as to underscore that these traits also characterize her.

Other deities associated with the lion, who could have influenced Kuṣāṇa art, are non-Indian Gods and Goddesses.⁷⁵ Nana's animal is the lion; indeed, it is the only animal associated with her on the Kuṣāṇa coinage.⁷⁶ Also there is the female (Goddess?) astride a lion on all the roundels comprising a golden belt found at the Bactrian site of Tillya Tepe. The god Mithra, who appears on Kuṣāṇa coinage is also associated with the lion. The lion may be present in the bull-slaying scene, such as occurs in a painting at Dura-Europos.⁷⁷ The significance of the lion in Mithraic iconography still needs to be worked out. However, it is interesting to note Hinnells' opinion that the animal may evoke connotations of "the sun, power, fire, rule",⁷⁸ and Duchesne-Guillemin's opinion that, in the Sassanian period, the lion may be a symbol of Mithra himself.⁷⁹

A lion throne (*simhāsana*), as is represented in abbreviated fashion in Pl. 20.18, is common in early Indian art, but probably only after the beginning of the Christian era. The

⁷¹ Jan Gonda, *Change and Continuity in Indian Religion*, The Hague, 1965, pp. 76-85.

⁷² E.g. RV 1.174.3 (Indra); RV 3.94.5; 5.15.3 (Agni); 9.89.3; 9.97.28 (Soma).

⁷³ Gonda, *Change and Continuity*, p. 86.

⁷⁴ See M.A. Langlois, *Harivansa* II, Paris, 1835, p. 216 (Lecture 175).

⁷⁵ Cf. Mukherjee, "Foreign Elements", 408-410.

⁷⁶ The lion is in the back of the seated Nana on the coins of Huviška and Kaniška II. See Göbl, *Münzprägung*, Series 359 & 660.

⁷⁷ John R. Hinnells, "Reflections on the bull-slaying scene", *Mithraic Studies* Vol. II, Manchester 1975, pp. 301-332; Pl. 24.

⁷⁸ Hinnells, "bull-slaying scene", p. 302.

⁷⁹ J. Duchesne - Guillemin, "Art et Religion sous les Sassanides", *Problemi attuali di Scienza e di Cultura*, Rome, 1971, p. 381.

oldest depiction of the lion's throne is found on the statue of Vima Khadphises.⁸⁰ Thereafter, portrayal of the *simhāsana*, with lions seated on either side of the throne is a frequent occurrence, especially in Buddhist art. The form of the leonine emblems on Vima's throne are however less like the later Indian examples and much more like those found on West Asian prototypes.⁸¹ Indeed, there is strong indication that the notion of a lion's throne is not an Indian motif, even though the Indians portrayed the lion from the Mauryan period onwards. To be part of a throne ought to imply that the lion is a royal symbol. But this is not the case in India, even though it is the case in the Near East. The Indian tradition has its own royal animal symbols, foremost of which is the tiger. The tiger's skin is an important ritual element in the Rājasūya, the ancient Indian royal consecration ritual. The king may stand on the tiger skin while receiving the important unction (*abhiṣeka*), and some Vedic authorities prescribe that the tiger skin be fastened to a wooden throne.⁸² Animals associated with the Cakravartin, or World-Ruler, are the horse and the elephant. These animals may figure among the "seven jewels" of the Cakravartin and may be depicted as such with him even in pre-Christian times. The lion is absent in these traditional contexts of regal power and prestige. On the contrary, the lion is the archtypal Middle Eastern symbol of royalty and probably the notion of a lion throne was brought into the Indian tradition by the Kuṣāṇas who adopted it from the West. In Kuṣāṇa Hindu art, the lion throne is rare; in fact I cannot cite an example other than the abbreviated version depicted with the eight-armed Warrior Goddess (Pl. 20.18).

In sum, the way that the lion appears in the iconography of the Devī points more to outside influences than influences from within the ancient Hindu traditions of India. However, the juxtaposing of gods and animals is not unknown within local traditions; certainly the way Garuḍa carries the seated Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa in a Kuṣāṇa relief from Mathurā⁸³ approaches the *vāhana* concept just as much as the way the lion carries the Warrior Goddess in the Mathurā relief of Pl. 20.1. Once again it would seem that the Goddess has assimilated into her iconography a motif originating from non-Indian sources but sufficiently familiar in the local traditions so as to be capable of being assimilated.

The triśūla cannot be associated with the Goddess as her hand-held attribute until the Kuṣāṇa reliefs. Prior to this period, the trident (with or without ax head), and without a bearer is found on the coins of the indigenous Punjabi tribe called the Audumbaras; these coins are pre-Kuṣāṇa, dating to circa the second–first centuries B.C.⁸⁴ It is necessary to go the Northwest for antecedents of the triśūla held as an attribute. The silver coins of Gondophares, the Indo-Parthian king, show a two-armed Śiva carrying the trident. From Sirkap, Taxila, comes a round copper seal on which Śiva is shown striding and holding the trident in his left hand.⁸⁵ These examples predate Kuṣāṇa coinage and

⁸⁰ See Rosenfield, *Dynastic Arts*, Fig. 1.

⁸¹ Rosenfield, *Dynastic Arts*, pp. 183–186.

⁸² J.C. Heesterman, *The Ancient Indian Royal Consecration*, 's-Gravenhage, 1957, p. 106.

⁸³ See D.M. Srinivasan, "Vaiṣṇava Art", Pl. 36. V.A.

⁸⁴ See D.M. Srinivasan, "Pre-Kuṣāṇa Śaivite Iconography", p. 35.

⁸⁵ See D.M. Srinivasan, "Pre-Kuṣāṇa Śaivite Iconography", p. 37.

reliefs. It has been proposed that the trident which appears frequently with Śiva on Kuṣāṇa coinage and on Gandhāran sculpture reflects iconographic influences from the Northwest.⁸⁶ Clearly the same must be said for the trisūla in the hand of the Warrior Goddess.

The stance of the Warrior Goddess in her Type 2 representations has no precedence or relationship to any indigenous mode of representation. True, there are not many combat scenes in early Indian art, especially scenes of combat between an animal and a hero. The one scene in the Kuṣāṇa art of Mathurā which may be comparable is schematically very different. This is the scene usually referred to as Kṛṣṇa fighting Keśin, which may however be a scene of a wrestler or hero fighting a horse (see Pls. 18.4 & 5 and Chapter 18). The hero is two-armed and he stops a leaping horse with the kick of an outstretched leg and the pressure from the elbow of a folded arm. The point of contact between the protagonists is minimal. In contrast, the Warrior Goddess is in close contact with her opponent; the entire body of the buffalo extends crosswise over her form. She grips him with both her hands in a deadly embrace; her multiple arms raise weapons around him and her legs flex to lock him in. The closest parallel I know for this sort of combat scene comes from examples of the Mithraic tauroctones. Of the five different ways in which Mithra's slaying of the bull can be portrayed,⁸⁷ one in particular is similar to the combat scene seen on the Kuṣāṇa reliefs of the Warrior Goddess. This type (conflate D E according to Campbell), shows the bull in a running position.⁸⁸ The hind legs extend backward in the running position; the front legs are sharply bent inward and are raised high above the ground. The bull crosses over the form of Mithra. Mithra grasps the bull by the nostrils or mouth with his left hand while holding himself against the side of the bull. Campbell illustrates this type, which he notes as "fairly common", by an example at Si'a, Syria; it was found near a temple of Dushara.⁸⁹ This type illustrates the characteristic overlapping of protagonists noticed in the reliefs of the Goddess; another type of tauroctony depiction illustrates raised weaponry, an element so perplexing in the iconography of the Warrior Goddess. In Subtype A (according to Campbell),⁹⁰ Mithra has not yet struck his blow and his arm is raised with the weapon in hand. Excellent examples are seen in the main cult statue in the Ostia Mithraeum and the Dura-Europos Mithraeum (dating c. second century A.D.).⁹¹ In the example from Ostia, Mithra's left hand also squeezes the muzzle of the bull, reminding that the Warrior Goddess can handle her adversary in much the same fashion (see Pl. 20.13). In a smaller Dura relief, the solar disc and lunar crescent are on either side of the tauroctony.⁹² Unquestionably,

⁸⁶ See Chapter 19, pp. 270-271. H. Härtel, "Maḥiṣāsūramardīnī".

⁸⁷ See L. Campbell, *Typology of Mithraic Tauroctones* in *Berytus* XI. Fasc. 1, 1954.

⁸⁸ Campbell, *Typology*, p. 22.

⁸⁹ No date is given for this example. But it may be noted that Campbell describes a coin of the conflate D E type showing Heracles killing a bull, which he dates to the third century A.D. See *Typology*, p. 22.

⁹⁰ *Typology*, p. 17.

⁹¹ J.R. Hinnells, "bull-slaying scene", Pls. 12a and 28b.

⁹² See Campbell, *Typology*, Pl. II.2. In the Dura relief, the crescent on the right contains a star, and the solar disc on the left has rays carved on the surface. In the Mathurā reliefs, the discs are reversed and the star and rays are not apparent. On the iconography of the sun and moon in Mithraic iconography, see L.A. Campbell, *Mithraic Iconography and Ideology*, Leiden, 1968, pp. 134-139. Pl. II. Fig. 37 (The Ethpani relief).

the Mithraic tauroctony displays a number of iconographic similarities with the iconography of the Warrior Goddess.

A fascinating dimension of the foreign elements in the Goddess's iconography is that there are some interconnections between the foreign elements themselves. That is, the Goddess appears to incorporate elements that can be found with Śiva (the trident, the investiture wreath on Kuṣāṇa coinage; the lion [Pls. 17.11 & 12], sun and moon [Pl. 19.11]; self-coronation [Pl. 19.19]); Nana (lion, wreath, sun and moon), Mithra (the combative stance; raised weaponry, lion, sun and moon), and these three divinities are themselves interrelated on the Kuṣāṇa coinage. For example, Oesho (i.e. Śiva) and Nana occur together in a series of Huviška's coin.⁹³ On an issue of Kaniška's copper coins minted in Kapisene/Bactria, three of the six substantive reverse types are Mithra, Nana and Oesho.⁹⁴ Under Huviška, the first copper issue minted in Gandhāra contains names of the same three deities out of the six.⁹⁵ Clearly, certain elements in the iconography of the Warrior Goddess are found in the iconography of three interrelating Kuṣāṇa deities.

Of these three, the influence of Mithra upon the iconography of the Warrior Goddess is least often noticed. Yet, he not only appears on Kuṣāṇa coins⁹⁶ but his image is also noted at Khalchayan, the oasis settlement in ancient Bactria, which may have been the royal residence of the early Kuṣāṇa ruler Heraus or his successors.⁹⁷ Therefore Mithra's artistic importance together with his religious importance was considerable among the early Kuṣāṇas. In the light of this, it is interesting to observe with Alexander C. Soper that Mithraic influences can be traced in another Kuṣāṇa artistic theme, namely the Gandhāran depictions of the Indrasāilagaha scene (i.e. the visit of Indra to the Buddha meditating in a cave).⁹⁸ The role of the cave in the tauroctony, the compositional arrangement of the cavernous chambers, the sculptural style in which god, mountain and ancillary figures are rendered, have similarity with a group of "Visit" stelae which Soper proves is "more than accidental".⁹⁹ Another curious set of iconographic similarities involve Mithra and the seated Gandhāran Goddess, referred to several times, because she has some connections with depictions of the Warrior Goddess. The jackal in a Roman tauroctony scene of the early third century A.D., (Pl. 20.26) looks quite similar to the animals on either side of the Goddess's throne (Pl. 20.10), and to those already identified as jackals in a Gandhāran relief having much in common with the Gandhāran Goddess

⁹³ Göbl, *Münzprägung*, p. 43; S. 167.

⁹⁴ D.W. MacDowall, "The Role of Mithra among the Deities of the Kuṣāṇa Coinage", *Mithraic Studies*, Vol. I, Manchester, 1975, p. 148.

⁹⁵ MacDowall, "Role of Mithra", p. 149.

⁹⁶ H. Humbach "Mithra in the Kuṣāṇa Period", *Mithraic Studies* Vol. I, Manchester 1975, pp. 135-141 points out that Mithra is limited to the coins of Kaniška and Huviška, but, that he was the most popular god on their coins minted in Bactria.

⁹⁷ G. Pougachenkova, "La Sculpture de Khalchayan", *Iranica Antiqua* V, 1965, 132-124. It is also possible that the edifice at Khalchayan was not built until two or three generations after Heraus according to B. Ja. Staviskij, *La Bactriane sous les Kushans*, transl. by P. Bernard, M. Burda, F. Grenet, P. Leriche from the Russian edition of 1977, Paris, 1986, pp. 225-226.

⁹⁸ Alexander C. Soper, "Aspects of Light Symbolism in Gandhāran Sculpture" *Artibus Asiae*, Vol. XII, 4, 1949, 253-263.

⁹⁹ Soper, "Light Symbolism", 260 and fn. 6.

(Pl. 20.27). Is it therefore more than accidental that the tauroctony should offer so many similarities with Kuṣāṇa scenes involving the Goddess who fights the buffalo?

There are other unmistakable influences from Western and Central Asian art. When the whole head of Mahiṣa is rendered as if seen from above (Pls. 20.2 & 9), the rendition clearly evokes the so-called "Animal Style" of Western and Central Asian art. (Indeed, the "Animal Style" is prominent in the art of Tillya Tepe, a Bactrian site). This peculiar "bird's eye" perspective occurs on a golden armlet from Central Asia, or Siberia, showing contorted felines grappling head to tail. The head of each feline is raised so that the snout is uppermost and the ears are lowermost; in other words, the whole back of the head is seen as from above. The armlet dates to circa the fourth century B.C.¹⁰⁰ Remarkably, a nearly identical armlet was found in the Northwest of the subcontinent and it is now in the Peshawar Museum (Pl. 20.28). K. Jettmar considers this armlet to have belonged to a chief of the nomadic warriors passing through Bactria and invading Northwestern India. Though recognizing its archaic features, he dates the armlet to the second century A.D.¹⁰¹ With this armlet survive linkages that should have existed between the subcontinent and terrains in Western and Northwestern and Central Asian territories under nomadic, Scytho-Parthian and Kuṣāṇa dominance. As of 1990, this armlet is not the only gold ornament found in Pakistan to display aspects of the Animal Style. Two golden ornaments, a bangle and a girdle, have been accidentally found by a shepherdess grazing her goats in the area of Pattan, Kohistan in the Northwestern Frontier Province. They are unique in the amount of gold used to make them; the girdle, of more than 16 kilos, shows Central Asian types hunting plus lots of animals: the horse, camel, tiger, stag, ibex, bear, a bird's eye view of an eagle with spreading wings etc. The vigorous "Animal Style" with its emphasis on coiled, fierce animal forms, often in profile and intertwining animal forms chasing and preying upon each other, is the wellspring from which the ornamentation is derived. This find was initially assigned to the 1st century B.C.¹⁰² Karl Jettmar published a detailed analysis of the girdle the following year (the bangle had since disappeared) from photographs alone.¹⁰³ His position is that the girdle dates between the 1st century–2nd century A.D. and reflects "archaic i.e. retarded features" of the Animal Style. The piece need not necessarily be an import, he suggests, but its craftsmen might well have been. They could have been employed by Śaka chieftains (the Scythians of India and the NW) who, we now know,¹⁰⁴ built up local enclaves of power

¹⁰⁰ It is in the Römisches-Germanisches Museum, Cologne. The armlet is illustrated in E. Bunker, C. Bruce Chatwin, A.R. Farkas, *"Animal Style" Art from East to West*, New York, 1970, Pl. 40.

¹⁰¹ K. Jettmar, *L'Art des Steppes*, Paris, 1964, p. 183; Pl. on same page. Jettmar associates the nomads with the Sarmatians.

¹⁰² Saeedur Rahaman, "Unique find of Gold Ornaments from Pattan (Kohistan)", *Journal of Central Asia*, Vol. XIII, No. 1, July, 1990, 5–17, with Note by Prof. A.H. Dani.

¹⁰³ Karl Jettmar, "The Art of the Northern Nomads in the Upper Indus Valley", *South Asian Studies* 7, 1991, 1–20.

¹⁰⁴ Apraca (Dir, Bajaur) and Oḍi (perhaps Kaghan), see Gérard Fussman, "Nouvelles Inscriptions Śaka: Ère d'Eucratide, Ère d'Azès, Ère Vikrama, Ère de Kaniṣka", *Bulletin de l'École Française d'Extrême-Orient* LXVII, 1980; "Documents Épigraphiques Kouchans (III) l'Inscription Kharoṣṭhī de Senavarma, Roi d'Oḍi: Une Nouvelle Lecture", *Bulletin de l'École Française d'Extrême-Orient* LXXI, 1982.

in parts of the Upper Indus Valley before they became vassals of the Kuṣāṇas. The royal Śaka patrons could have ordered objects replicating signs and symbols of their nomadic ancestors as a way to proclaim their ethnic and social identity.¹⁰⁵ With the collective evidence from the three golden ornaments, it becomes possible to grasp how a retarded Animal Style could occur in these regions. It could have been perpetuated by the Śakas in the Northwest. Since Śaka power extended to Mathurā by the 1st century A.D. (see also Chapter 21) it becomes theoretically possible for Śaka rulers to introduce Mathurā craftsmen to the Style, via the treasures they brought with them. In the light of such connections, it will not come as a surprise that Mahiṣa's folded front legs on the Mathurā reliefs could well relate to the convention seen in the "Animal Style". Animals on Scythian harnesses, bridles etc. (as well as the above mentioned girdle)¹⁰⁶ often have legs tucked under the body.¹⁰⁷ A leaping deer with folded forelegs and outstretched hind legs shows considerable similarity with the general form of the Kuṣāṇa Mahiṣa. The deer, found in Siberia but of Iranian workmanship, dates to circa the fourth-third centuries B.C.; it was originally a handle on a silver vase.¹⁰⁸ When this leaping deer is held beside the leaping horse (Keśin?, seen in Pls. 18.4 & 5), and both are compared with the form of the Mahiṣa buffalo struggling against the Goddess, the nomadic influence upon the buffalo is readily apparent.

Iconographically, the controlling input upon the Warrior Goddess and the buffalo comes from the Northwest and Western Asia. The influence from these regions is also, but to a lesser extent, reflected in the sculptural style. And that fact calls forth one more enigma. The Northwest does not, for all its influence, produce images of the Goddess who fights the buffalo; neither in pre-Kuṣāṇa times nor in Kuṣāṇa times is she represented in regions north of the Doab. What appears to be missing is a context. There is no story of a buffalo-slaying deity in that region, that I know of. Tucci, who scanned the background of the region's religious beliefs in connection with an eighth to ninth century image of an eight-armed Divine Huntress found at Swat, could not find ancient legends pertaining to a local divine huntress or to buffalo-slaying goddess, although he was looking for both.¹⁰⁹

Images of the Warrior Goddess stem, overwhelmingly, from that bastion of Brahmanic culture, Mathurā. Moreover, there is a story in the Brahmanic tradition which has relevance. The Mahābhārata, as is well known, contains a story of the slaying of Mahiṣa by Śiva's son, Skanda/Kārttikeya. It is told in the Aranyaka Parvan (3.221.1–80), how Skanda Mahāsena (lit. leader of a great army), defeated the powerful Mahiṣa and his troops. It is a fierce battle. Śiva could have waged it, but refrained, knowing that the victory belongs to Skanda/Kārttikeya (3.221.60). The story, however, has no cosmic implications. Al-

¹⁰⁵ Jettmar, "Art of the Northern Nomads", 10.

¹⁰⁶ See the center stag in Rahman, "Gold Ornament", Pl. XI; Jettmar, "Art of the Northern Nomads", Fig. 22h.

¹⁰⁷ Bunker, Chatwin, Farkas, "Animal Style", Pl. 39 (from Central Asia; circa sixth-fifth century B.C.); Pl. 35 (circa fifth century B.C.).

¹⁰⁸ See *From the Lands of the Scythians*, New York, 1976; Pl. 98, p. 116. The piece is in the Hermitage Museum.

¹⁰⁹ G. Tucci, "Oriental Notes II. An Image of a Devī Discovered in Swat and Some Connected Problems", *East and West* Vol. 14, 1963, 146–182.

though the deed is Skanda's "first claim to fame",¹¹⁰ it is not his last. Skanda/Kārttikeya kills several demons in this epic and his slaying of Tāraka is also a compelling exploit. But there may be more to this story. Several manuscripts of both the Northern and Southern recensions, but not incorporated into the critical edition, continue the tale with a development that may have special meaning for a Northern region. After Mahāsenā splits Mahiṣa's head with his spear (3.221.66) these manuscripts relate that the fallen head of Mahiṣa barred the entrance, extending in length sixteen *yojanas*, to the country of the Northern Kurus (Uttara Kurus). It became inaccessible after that, although at present the people of that country pass easily through the gate. The Uttara Kurus may be a mythic people in the epic, where their habits reflect Northern (Northwestern?) ways.¹¹¹ They are still an historical people in the Aitareya Brāhmaṇa. They and the Uttara Madras are located beyond the Himalayas (viii.14). Their land, which one Jānantapi Atyarāti was anxious to conquer, is called the land of the gods (*deva-kṣetra* viii.23). The speech of the Northerners, presumably among these people, is according to the Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa (III.2.3.15), especially pure. The Warrior Goddess seems to take over in art Skanda/Kārttikeya's combat and victory in literature, wherein the deed may allude to the preservation of a land's purity (in language?; in ethnicity?) by a warrior. Perhaps the Warrior Goddess inherits some of these notions; possibly she represents victory over outsiders' impurities and protectress of safe boundaries.

I am tempted to believe that the Goddess did more than borrow Skanda/Kārttikeya's story. It is possible that her characteristic number of arms is under the influence of a number characteristically associated with Skanda/Kārttikeya. Skanda/Kārttikeya has six heads. Born of the six Kṛittikās (see Chapter 22), the Pleiades personified, who each wanted to nurse him, the divine babe produced six faces so as to satisfy each one. Here is another instance of the mathematical usage of the number "six". If it is accepted that Skanda's story was, for some reason appropriated by the Warrior Goddess, the possibility exists that she was likewise associated with six bodily parts. Six heads would not be preferred since there already existed a Goddess with six heads (see Śaṣṭhī, in Chapter 22), and since multiplication of the limbs of action is perhaps more appropriate in a theme of combat. This line of reasoning implies that six arms ought to be the initial number of multiple arms associated with the Warrior Goddess. Indeed we surmise that her eight-armed images are late Kuṣāṇa productions. Twelve-arms came about in the Gupta Period. I suspect her four arms may have appeared after her six-arms were codified.¹¹² From Kuṣāṇa coinage, it may be deduced that the Kuṣāṇas adopted the multiplicity convention in the time of Kaniṣka, when Śiva's multiple arms begin to appear on the coins. It is therefore possible that during the same period, a six-armed Devī having

¹¹⁰ J.A.B. van Buitenen, *The Mahābhārata*; Books 2 & 3; Chicago, 1975, p. 664.

¹¹¹ Cf. Hopkins, *Epic Mythology*, p. 186. "The Uttara Kurus . . . associate with spirits born of water and fire and mountain . . ."; their corpses are taken up by birds and buried in caves (p. 20).

¹¹² "Of course, the production of six-armed images did not stop with the formulation of 'four' and 'eight' armed images. It is interesting to note that my overall chronological development for the Kuṣāṇa imagery of the Goddess based on multiple arms, agrees with that proposed by Härtel but based on different iconographic components. See H. Härtel, *Mahiṣāsūramardini*", p. 82.

many traits in common with deities venerated by Kuṣāṇas, could be endorsed, and venerated. If all these possibilities are accepted, then it would seem that the Goddess's multiple arms did not initially have symbolic meaning. I would conjecture that the sun and moon discs (e.g. Pl. 20.16), more than her six-arms, bespeak of the Goddess's cosmic nature. It is not possible, because of lack of evidence, to determine whether her four or eight arms had symbolic significance. I suspect they did not, for once the six-armed images developed, the four and eight arms could have occurred because the option was available from other cosmic images. The same ateliers that produced the Goddess's images, probably produced four-armed *śaiva* images and four and eight-armed *vaiṣṇava* images.

The enigmas concerning the sudden appearance of a multi-armed Warrior Goddess must be tempered by the fact that her imagery offers a remarkable display of cultural synthesis. Unlike *śaiva* art during the Kuṣāṇa period, which can be divided into two main currents, displaying a Northern and a Southern component, the imagery of the Warrior Goddess occurs only in the Doab and merges different components. A great synthesis took place and possibly her popularity is because she meant so many (and different?) things to so many (and different?) people.

CHAPTER TWENTY ONE

WHY MATHURĀ?

“Why Mathurā?” means “why does Mathurā become the first producer of Brahmanic art”, and, “why does Mathurā become the first producer of many Brahmanic icons having multiple bodily parts”? “Why Mathurā?” inquires into the possible causes for Mathurā’s ability to invent Brahmanic iconography. The designation “Brahmanic” is used advisedly. It highlights a connection between descriptions in Brahmanic texts and pre-Gupta representations of Viṣṇu, Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa and the triple reality of Śiva. These gods and the theological beliefs expressed by their forms are mainly grounded in the traditions of ancient Hinduism, which can also be designated as Brahmanism to emphasize religious developments going from Vedic through Brahmanic and into śāstric and epic writings. The Warrior Goddess does not stem from Brahmanism. Yet she is almost always represented with the multiplicity convention which arises from Brahmanic conceptualizations. So, “Brahmanic” does not here refer only to literary phenomena, it also refers to cultural dynamics that could successfully transform Brahmanic ideas into artistic conventions.

Most of Mathurā’s *vaiṣṇava* and *śaiva* Kuṣāṇa sculptures are fully developed, iconographic statements. Prior stages of experimentation are either minimal or non-existent. Though the stylistic antecedents are not too difficult to trace, it is quite another matter to explain the full range of a developed iconography in sectarian art. How is one to explain that an art which is varied, complex and quite consistent can arise without prior experimentation and also be accepted by worshippers both within Mathurā and by those in peripheral areas importing Mathurā art or adopting its idioms? “Why Mathurā?” is therefore also an inquiry into the phenomenon of artistic invention in Mathurā and its simultaneous adoption beyond Mathurā’s borders. While this phenomenon may also apply to the Buddhist and Jain images fashioned in Mathurā during the Kuṣāṇa period, it is with the Brahmanic sphere that this chapter is concerned.¹

¹ At this writing, I am not entirely convinced that the conditions fostering inventions in Brahmanic iconography are necessarily similar to those fostering inventions and elaborations in Buddhist and Jain iconography. It is an open question which needs to be looked into. An interesting paper recently published proposes that Pāṭaliputra was another art center in Kuṣāṇa times and bases this conclusion on stylistic reevaluations and chronological reassignments of non-Brahmanical sculptures from the Patna area (See Frederick Asher and Walter Spink “Maurya Figural Sculpture Reconsidered”, *Ars Orientalis* Vol. 19, 1989, 1–25). Whereas this is an interesting proposition, I hesitate to accept it for two reasons. It entails reassigning four Mauryan colossi to the Kuṣāṇa period, to wit the Didarganj Yakṣī, the two Patna Yakṣas and the Lohanipur torso. The heyday of colossal Yakṣa and Yakṣī figures is before the Christian era (see Chapter 15, and Chapter 18, p. 257). Indeed, it is as if colossal Yakṣas retreat with the advance of sectarian figures modeled on the Mahā Puruṣa/Mahā Vīra concept. Redating these four sculptures alleviates a problem perceived by the authors, namely that a very small group of highly accomplished sculptures have “no comparable contemporaries, antecedents or immediate descendents” (p. 5). This phenomenon, evident also in Reh, Malhār, Bhīṭā, Vidiśā etc. for Brahmanic art, ceases to be a problem when we cease to expect that places producing religious art

"Why Mathurā?" implies that other locales could, without benefit of hindsight, have become centers of Brahmanic art. That is true. Mathurā is one of about eleven different sites where Brahmanic sculptures have been found (cf. Map A). The figure jumps to sixteen sites if coinage is included, that is, coinage featuring Brahmanic iconography. With the advent of the Kuṣāṇa age, most of these sites cease to contain Brahmanic art. Others take their place, but none can match Mathurā in quantity, quality and inventive capability.

Mathurā's unrivalled position can best be grasped by citing quantities. The overview which follows cites the number of Kuṣāṇa representations made of Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa, Viṣṇu, Śiva and the Warrior Goddess since the capacity to innovate artistically, especially with the multiplicity convention, predominates in the images of these divinities.

Mathurā and environs² completely dominate the production of śaiva art in the Kuṣāṇa age.³ Extant from this region are: four free-standing Liṅgas, seven Ekamukha Liṅgas,⁴ one Dvimukha Liṅga, three Caturmukha Liṅgas,⁵ one Liṅga with two addorsed figures,⁶ seven images of Maheśa of which only three full-length examples remain, eight Ardhanārīśvara images,⁷ three representations of Umāpati, one head of Aghora Śiva, one head of Virūpākṣa Śiva, one head of three-eyed Śiva wearing a turban (No. 59.227 in the Boston, Museum of Fine Arts), [all the heads are originally from larger images],⁸ three fragments of Śiva's lower figure. Beyond the region of Mathurā, a sudden drop in numbers occurs. Kauśāmbī has two Caturmukha Liṅgas as well as several broken śaiva terracottas.⁹ To Bhīṭā can be assigned one terracotta of Umāpati.¹⁰ To Western India (Khed Brahmā or Śāmalājī) can be designated one Ekamukha Liṅga that may be of the Kuṣāṇa period. As for the Nand Liṅga, *in situ* near Puṣkara (Rajasthan), it may be best to follow Kreisel and consider this work as part of the Mathurā school.¹¹ Of the four Gandhāran Śiva icons, it is risky to assign any but the post-Kuṣāṇa piece from Akhun Dheri to a specific provenance.

It is easy to see that no other place challenges Mathurā's lead in the production of

in the B.C. period need to be artistic centers. The "art" produced could be in response to other stimuli (cf. Chaps. 16 & 17).

² By environs I mean regions outside of Mathurā District but still inside of its geographical sphere of influence.

³ The tabulation that follows for Śaiva, Vaiṣṇava art and the icons of the Warrior Goddess are based on pieces fully discussed in the previous Chapters 18–20.

⁴ Kreisel (*Śiva Bildwerke*), adds twelve more. These are (according to his catalogue and photo numbers): 17, 20, 23, 24, 25, 26, 28, 29–33.

⁵ Kreisel (*Śiva Bildwerke*) considers Mathura Museum No. 516 (his No. 61) as Late Kuṣāṇa. Note also the Chauma Liṅga (Agra Dist.), which has four symbolic forms facing in the quadrants (see Kreisel, *Śiva Bildwerke*, pp. 77–78).

⁶ It is from Gāmāri, Bharatpur Dist. in Rajasthan.

⁷ One Ardhanārīśvara torso is in Kreisel (*Śiva Bildwerke*, No. 115).

⁸ Kreisel (*Śiva Bildwerke*), notes four more Late Kuṣāṇa heads in his Nos. 85–87, 93.

⁹ These heads have the third eye on the brow. They are found in the Allahabad Museum (Nos. K 4859, K 2912, K 11). A Śiva head in the Patna Museum (No. 5818) is similar to No. K 4859 and may be also from Kauśāmbī. A small terracotta Ekamukha Liṅga now in the Allahabad Museum (Pl. 21.1) may originate from Mathurā according to Dr. S.C. Kala, *Terracottas in the Allahabad Museum*, New Delhi, 1980, p. 105, Fig. 294.

¹⁰ Circa thirty kms. from Bhīṭā, at Jhūsī was found a terracotta Caturmukha Liṅga dated to the Kuṣāṇa period by Kaia (*Terracottas*, Fig. 291).

¹¹ See Kreisel, *Śiva Bildwerke*, p. 207.

śaiva icons. Even more important, no other site produces the three typologies symbolic of Śiva's essential nature.

The position of Mathurā with respect to *vaiṣṇava* art is hardly less seminal. Every extant *vaiṣṇava* type known in the Kuṣāṇa age is either invented or represented in Mathurā's *vaiṣṇava* assemblage. The assemblage includes: twenty-five single representations of four-armed Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa, and about nine more of this god as part of a group, two eight-armed images, one of which can be identified as Trivikrama, six *avatāra* images featuring Kṛṣṇa, Varāha, Hayagrīva [and the Trivikrama], one Caturvyūha, at least twelve Saṃkarṣaṇa/Balarāma images (displaying two distinct iconographic types), and one representation of Bhagavān Nārāyaṇa. Outside of the Mathurā sphere, the same reduction, as noticed in *śaiva* images, occurs in *vaiṣṇava* images. Five other sites are sources of *vaiṣṇava* art, but only Amreli yields more than one item. From Devamgarh (Gayā Dist.) comes one Vṛṣṇi kinship trio; from Jhusi (Allahabad Dist.) comes a head of Balarāma; from Malwa comes a *vaiṣṇava* head, from Kauśāmbī an eight-armed *vaiṣṇava* image, and from Amreli three small stone plaques of Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa. The Mathurā idiom is detected, to some degree, in all of these pieces. Mathurā is the hub translating the *vaiṣṇava* faith into *vaiṣṇava* art.

The role of Mathurā in creating images of the Warrior Goddess is unusual. Quite simply, Mathurā has a monopoly, or, near monopoly,¹² depending on whether the eight-armed Warrior Goddess in the Archaeological Survey of Indian-Agra Collection (Pl. 20.20), is found to be from Agra or Mathurā; in any case about 30 miles separate Agra from Mathurā, so that the general area is the same. No other area in the Kuṣāṇa period can, for the present, be identified as a center for the production of images of the Warrior Goddess.¹³ This means that Mathurā alone was able to synthesize the many Northwestern elements which characterize the iconography of the Warrior Goddess. The synthesis was a success to judge from the large number of images found in Mathurā; thirty-eight can be counted to date. To this number can be added images made in Mathurā and exported to Haryana and Ahichchhatrā (see Chapter 20).

It is by no means obvious from the pre-Kuṣāṇa evidence that Mathurā could rally a great school of art and capture the lead as inventor and supplier of Brahmanic images. The notion of a school producing Brahmanic art did not, in fact, exist prior to the Kuṣāṇa age. No one place produced sufficiently to become that influential; this point

¹² F.D.K. Bosch had dated a Mahiṣāsūramardīnī from Besnagar to the second century A.D. ("Remarques sur les influences reciproques de l'iconographie et de la mythologie indiennes" *Arts Asiatiques*, Vol. III, 1956, p. 27, no illustration). He based his dating on the appearance of lions flanking the Goddess; they reminded him of the lions on either side of the Buddha's throne in early Indian art. Also he noted that the Goddess stands on the buffalo whereas in the later art she battles with him. Unfortunately, this line of reasoning, now quite out of date, is still being cited. It has of course been long established that the earliest examples are from North India and show the battle; only the later ones show the Goddess standing on the head of Mahiṣa. (cf. P. Granoff, "Mahiṣāsūramardīnī: An Analysis of the Myths", *East and West* Vol. 29, 1979, pp. 149-150; she cites Bosch but only partially refutes his arguments.) There is only one early example (i.e. third century A.D. and therefore one to two hundred years after the earliest examples from North India) from Sannatti interpreted as the Goddess standing on the buffalo head, but it is not an entirely satisfactory example (see fn. 10, Chapter 20).

¹³ I am assuming that the relief found in southern Haryana (see Chapter 20, p. 288), originates from Mathurā.

comes out rather clearly from the evidence presented in Chapters 16 and 17. All the localities featuring pre-Kuṣāṇa śaiva and vaiṣṇava art are primarily cult spots. Mathurā is one of these, in addition to being a producer of Buddhist, Jain, ancient Hindu, and folk art. However, it is difficult to consider Mathurā, in pre-Kuṣāṇa times, as the center which influences the course of Brahmanic art. Mathurā is not the place where the first Pañcamukha Liṅga and Caturmukha image are found; Bhīṭā is. Mathurā is not the place wherefrom comes the earliest known multi-armed vaiṣṇava image. Malhār is. And over one hundred fifty years prior to the Morā Well inscription (informing that a stone temple in or around Mathurā housed figures of the Pañcavīras), there stood a temple at Besnagar (Vidiśā) to the Pañcavīras. Of course, the soil of Mathurā and other localities could one day yield stone images and pillars similar to the unique examples from Bhīṭā, Malhār and Besnagar. That would not, however, change the fact that they also exist in these places. At the present state of our knowledge regarding the extent and dispersal pattern of pre-Kuṣāṇa śaiva and vaiṣṇava art, no influential or influencing center can be postulated.

Prior to the Śuṅga period, Mathurā's future role as a center of art could not have been predicted. Its level of prosperity would have seemed too low. Mathurā had little to distinguish it from many other urban settlements in the Doab. True, it was a center of the Śūrasena janapada, but it was probably not an impressive political center, like Hastināpura, Indraprastha, Ayodhyā or Ahichchhatrā.¹⁴ Excavated data for the pre-Mauryan period suggest that Mathurā was a village. During the Mauryan period, Mathurā grew into a more extensive settlement. But, it was still overshadowed by the great administrative centers of the time: Pāṭaliputra, Taxila and Ujjain.¹⁵ During the same time and into the early centuries of the Christian era, Mathurā also was not one of the flourishing agricultural areas. It is even doubtful whether the town produced enough crops in antiquity to support its own urban population. The problem was insufficient water (insufficient overflow of the Yamunā and insufficient rainfall).¹⁶ Mathurā does seem to have been an active market depot in the Mauryan period. The Arthaśāstra (II.11)¹⁷ and the Divyāvadāna (XXVI) make reference, respectively, to its production of cotton, and to its northern trade. Contact with the north and important Gangetic towns is borne out by the dispersal pattern of etched beads. A barrel shaped bead with a pentagonal design within marginal bands was found in Mathurā during c. the fourth and third century B.C., to the first century B.C. The same type occurs from Mauryan times onwards at Ahichchhatrā, Hastināpura, Nasik, Rajgir, Taxila, Tilaura-kot, Tripura and Vaiśālī.¹⁸ Since Mathurā does not have a bead industry, these beads are imported and show, thereby, trade con-

¹⁴ Cf. Romila Thapar, *From Lineage to State*, Bombay 1984, pp. 90–91.

¹⁵ Romila Thapar, "The Early History of Mathurā: up to and Including the Mauryan Period", *Mathurā: The Cultural History*, ed. D.M. Srinivasan, p. 17.

¹⁶ See R.S. Sharma, "Trends in the Economic History of Mathurā (c. 300 B.C.–A.D. 300)", *Mathurā: The Cultural Heritage*, p. 31.

¹⁷ See R. Thapar, ("History of Mathurā", fn. 57); the text names "Madhurā" which could either be the northern or the southern city.

¹⁸ C. Margabandhu, "Etched Beads from Mathurā Excavations – A Note", *Mathurā: The Cultural Heritage*, p. 202.

nections with other towns where the same bead is found. The connection between Mathurā and Taxila is also supported by the appearance of Mathurā sandstone in Stratum III of Bhir Mound,¹⁹ as well as the appearance in both regions of rather distinctive anthropomorphic pots.²⁰ In all likelihood, Mathurā was also a depot on a trade route connecting Kauśāmbī (the important commercial and political center on the Yamunā), and centers farther West. A western route, active during Mauryan times, linked the port of Bharukaccha to Ujjain, Vidiśā and Kauśāmbī, where it could branch northward to Mathurā, to Taxila and reach the Kabul Valley.²¹ Though Mathurā functioned as a stopping point on trade routes going North, West (and probably South),²² apparently little was exported (save cotton and sandstone) and little was imported. Mainly beads have been identified as imported from the outside;²³ of course some items may not have survived. In the main, it can be argued that the level of prosperity was insufficient to allow for much importation of imperishable goods. But, already at this stage, there are indicators that Mathurā has the potential to compensate for its limited agricultural capacity. It takes skilled craftsmen to know where to quarry and to make their livelihood by quarrying sandstone,²⁴ just as it takes skilled craftsmen to produce a fine cotton;²⁵ it will be by means of skilled labour, such as artisans and merchants, that the economic strength of Mathurā is to be spurred on.²⁶

If political, agricultural and commercial distinctiveness eluded Mathurā in pre-Śuṅga days, religious distinctiveness probably did not. Pilgrims probably passed through Mathurā on their travels within a religious circuit, or a pilgrimage tour. Some of the pilgrimage routes interlaced with trade routes and this mingling seems to have effected religious art by stimulating its production. For example, along the Mathurā-Kauśāmbī passageway, trade route overlaps with pilgrimage route, as this is the route along the sacred Yamunā River heading towards the *tīrtha* of Prayāga; along this passageway are located three, probably four, of the findspots of pre-Kuṣāṇa Brahmanical art.²⁷ Pilgrims passing through Mathurā would find considerable religious activity in the town itself. Mathurā was a stronghold of Brahmanic culture in those early days. The somewhat later passage in the *Mānava Dharmaśāstra* (II.19), which assigns the country of the Śūrasenas to the land of

¹⁹ See John Marshall, *Taxila*, Vol. I, Reprint. Motilal Banarsidass, 1975, p. 105.

²⁰ See Chapter 14, pp. 190–191.

²¹ H.P. Ray, "Early Historical Urbanization: the case of the Western Deccan", *World Archaeology*, Vol. 19, No. 1, pp. 96–97.

²² See Shiva G. Bajpai, "Mathurā: Trade Routes, Commerce and Communication Patterns, from the Post-Mauryan Period to the End of the Kuṣāṇa Period", *Mathurā: The Cultural Heritage*, p. 48.

²³ M.C. Joshi, "Mathurā as an Ancient Settlement", *Mathurā: The Cultural Heritage*, p. 167.

²⁴ The socio-economic implication of quarrying sandstone was backed by Dr. Gregory L. Possehl (University Museum; University of Pennsylvania) whose careful consideration of this question I acknowledge with pleasure.

²⁵ A special type of cloth (*paṭa*), called Mathurā, is mentioned a little later by Patañjali (V.3.55).

²⁶ The late Brhatkalpa Bhāṣya sums up well the source of Mathurā's prosperity, stating that its people lived on trade, not agriculture; see J.C. Jain, *Life in Ancient India as depicted in the Jaina Canon*, Bombay 1974, p. 114, fn. 16; see also p. 115 and fn. 29.

²⁷ The three are: Mathurā, Mūsānagar and Bhīṭā. The fourth could be Reh, depending upon whether it is considered pre- or early Kuṣāṇa (see Chapter 17, pp. 221–223). The distribution of etched beads with Pattern No. 3 (in Margabandhu, "Etched Beads", p. 203), confirms the traffic and contact in this zone.

the Vedic ṛṣis, is understood to accurately reflect a tradition in ancient Mathurā which elevated the status of Brahmans and Brahmanical life. Most likely, Heroes (Vīras) were worshipped in Mathurā. By the middle of the first millenium B.C., Kṣatriyas, such as the Vṛṣṇis of Mathurā, became apotheosized heroes. Quite possibly, Hero Worship was practiced early in Mathurā since the heroic ideal could thrive in an atmosphere infused with Brahmanic values. Theoretically, the only source of income for a Brahman priest is the gifts (*dakṣiṇā*), he receives from the sacrificer (the *yajamāna*), for whom he performs sacrifices. Wealthy sacrificers often come from the Kṣatriya class. Largess to Brahmans was idealized from the beginning of the Vedic religion and continued to be extolled in Vedic and Brahmanic literature. A Brahman's expectations are well illustrated in the *Mānava Dharmaśāstra*: "... a king shall bestow as is proper, jewels of all sorts and presents for the sake of sacrifices on the Brahmans learned in the Vedas".²⁸ The reciprocity existing between the Brahman priest and the liberal Kṣatriya could well have contributed to the idealization and consequent apotheosis of the latter. Given that Hero Worship could thrive in a place like Mathurā, and that, in fact, Mathurā's Vṛṣṇi Heroes were sufficiently well established by the Śuṅga age to warrant a temple at Besnagar, it does not seem at all unreasonable to suppose that in Mathurā itself, worship to the Vṛṣṇi Vīras, with or without icons, already existed at a pre-Śuṅga date.

Sometime during and after the second century B.C., changes occurred in Mathurā which caused it to attain distinctiveness in more areas than religion. Recent excavations at Mathurā show that the period from circa second century B.C. to the end of the first century B.C. (i.e. Period III of the excavator) is a period of urban refinement, especially towards the end of the period.²⁹ At Sonkh, the solidity and comfort of the structures dating to the time of Sūryamitra (circa 80–50 B.C.), as well as the abundance of finds create the impression of an age of great prosperity. Signs of a thriving community at Sonkh continue into the Kṣatrapa phase (which reaches into the early decades of the Christian era at Sonkh). Real farmsteads emerge; houses are built in sections and are protected at the street corners by large stones against damages from vehicles. One house contains a luxury unknown in later constructions, namely a combined bathroom and toilet.³⁰ What causes the rise in prosperity? Numerous small finds indicate that Mathurā maintains and expands her inter-regional connections. A bead pattern known in Taxila, Kauśāmbī, Rajghat, Rajgir, Śrāvastī and Vaiśālī in the fourth century B.C., appears in the second century B.C. at Mathurā.³¹ Anthropomorphic vessels continue at both Taxila (Sirkap) and the Mathurā area; also a similar type of votive tank³² and acanthus leaf decoration are found in both regions.³³ Further, Mathurā probably experienced eco-

²⁸ Georg Bühler, *The Laws of Manu*, Dover edition, 1969, p. 431, re: XI.4.

²⁹ Joshi, "Mathurā", p. 168.

³⁰ Herbert Härtel, "Some Results of the Excavations at Sonkh", *German Scholars on India* Vol. II, Bombay 1976, 75.

³¹ Margabandhu, "Etched Beads", pp. 203–204. This is Bead Pattern No. 6 which occurs at Tilaura-kot from the third century B.C.

³² Cf. Marshall, *Taxila* Vol. III, Pl. 136, Nos. 158, 159; described in *Taxila* Vol. II, p. 464. See Härtel, "Sonkh", Fig. 29, p. 89.

³³ Downward pointing acanthus leaves are found on a small stūpa in Sirkap (Marshall, *Taxila* Vol. III,

conomic growth and greater cultural diversity due to population shifts and the influx of foreign people.

Migrations of Buddhists and Jains into Mathurā during the Śuṅga Period may have resulted from Śuṅga religious attitudes. Puṣyamitra, who established the line, was a keen supporter of Brahmanic orthodoxy. He usurped the Mauryan throne, ruled from the Mauryan capital at Pāṭaliputra and established himself in the central portion of the former Mauryan empire. The eastern portion under his control was the heartland of Buddhism and Jainism. These religions appealed to the mercantile class which was economically strong but low on the Brahmanic social scale. Under a hostile (or indifferent) rule, Buddhists and Jains seeking to migrate would find Mathurā an attractive place to settle. Its trading connections were expanding and it does not seem to have been under direct Śuṅga rule.³⁴ The possible shift of people and money from East to West may help explain why the Jain establishment at Kaṅkālī Tīlā was not founded before the later part of Period III at Mathurā.³⁵ It may also put in perspective Patañjali's observation that the residents of Mathurā were more cultured than those of Saṃkāśya and Pāṭaliputra (see Mahābhāṣya 5.3.57). By the first century B.C., Mathurā may also have experienced the influx of foreigners; the town may have been a Yavana base. A Yavana king is known to have retreated to Mathurā after he suffered a defeat farther East.³⁶ By the close of the first century B.C., or the beginning of the Christian era, Mathurā becomes even more closely linked to the Northwest and foreign influences. The town comes under the political authority of the Kṣatrapas, and the first ruler, Mahākṣatrapa Rajuvula, had antecedents perhaps both in Taxila and Sagala.³⁷ A text of approximately the same time, the Milindapañha, gives a good idea of Mathurā's growing stature; the text includes Mathurā in a list of important cities.³⁸

It is due to the changes that occurred during Mathurā's Śuṅga phase and its periods of local and Kṣatrapa rule that the settlement was transformed into an important city. Mathurā had become a viable node on trade routes; prosperous people lived there; Buddhists, Jains, Śaivites, Bhāgavatas (including devotees of the Pañcavīras), lived and worshipped there; shrines and stūpas defined its urban profile;³⁹ its Vṛṣṇi Heroes were

pl. 120 A), and in Mathurā (V.A. Smith, *The Jain Stupa and other Antiquities of Mathura*, 2nd Edition, Delhi, 1969 Pl. LI; No. 2).

³⁴ Cf. Doris Meth Srinivasan, "Introduction", *Mathurā: The Cultural Heritage*, pp. xii, xiv.

³⁵ Joshi, "Mathurā", p. 168.

³⁶ On the interpretation of Khāravela's Hathigumpha inscription of circa second half of the first century B.C., see B.D. Chattopadhyaya, "Mathurā from the Śuṅga to the Kuṣāṇa Period: An Historical Outline", *Mathurā: The Cultural Heritage*, p. 21. It is also possible, according to Chattopadhyaya, that Mathurā served as a springboard for Yavana raids into south Rajasthan.

³⁷ Chattopadhyaya, "Historical Outline", p. 21.

³⁸ Milindapañha V.4.

³⁹ In addition to the establishment at Kaṅkālī Tīlā (supra), Buddhist uprights, roundels and toranas testify to the existence of stupas dating to circa first century B.C.–mid-first century A.D. See L. Bachhofer, *Early Indian Sculpture*, Reprint. New Delhi 1973, Pl. 72; Ph. Vogel, *La Sculpture de Mathurā*, Ars Asiatica XV Paris et Bruxelles, 1930, Pl. XV; N.P. Joshi, *Mathurā Sculptures*, Mathura, 1966, Fig. 12. According to the Morā Well inscription, a shrine to the Vṛṣṇi Pañcavīras stood at the beginning of the first century A.D. Possibly the votive tank from Sonkh (see fn. 30), features the remains of a Nāga shrine, in which case it may be supposed that large shrines, not just votive shrines, stood on the soil of Mathurā in pre-Kuṣāṇa times.

worshipped in far off places;⁴⁰ cultural and ethnic diversity could be found there. These changes did not undermine the elevated status of Brahmanism in Mathurā. The same period marked by the influx of new ideas and new peoples (i.e. Period III), also knows the use of the Vedic *yūpa*.⁴¹ The purely Brahmanic system of *gotra* is maintained,⁴² and the use of metonymics in inscriptions (i.e. mentioning the mother by her *gotra*) continues from the Śunga through the Kṣatrapa periods.⁴³ Brahmanic culture seems even to have influenced the Kṣatrapa court.⁴⁴

By the time Mathurā becomes an important center in the extensive Kuṣāṇa empire, no other urban center in the Doab had successfully wedded a dynamic economy, religious and ethnic diversity and an artistic climate to a long-standing Brahmanical tradition. This alliance could help forge a need for Brahmanical art within the Mathurā school of art when the latter arose in the Kuṣāṇa period.

Mathurā's leadership as an artistic center in the Doab, during the Kuṣāṇa period, is so well and so long established that it may no longer seem necessary to inquire into aspects of its flowering. But quite a number of matters do need further scrutiny. Certainly the arising of the full-range of Brahmanic art at a time when Mathurā becomes a cosmopolitan city needs comment. How could a tradition-based art flower at a time when power and wealth were in the hands of non-traditional segments of society? It must be registered that though power and wealth were spread among a heterogenous society in Mathurā, the high status given to Brahmans and Brahmanic values seems to have continued. The Kuṣāṇas, not unlike the Kṣatrapas before them, did not upset Brahmanic conventions. Indeed they may even have given official patronage to some. A Mathurā inscription of the year 28 of Huviṣka states that a *puṇyaśāla* (lit. "an alms-house"), was constructed where a hundred Brahmans were fed on the 14th day of the bright half of the month. In that the merit from this act is said to go to Huviṣka, it may be that the king himself was the patron.⁴⁵ Another inscription also bespeaks of the accommodating gestures towards Mathurā's Brahmans which prevailed during the Kuṣāṇa period. The inscription comes from a village near to Māt, site of the shrine housing deities wor-

⁴⁰ Some examples have been discussed in Chapter 16. It should also be noted that a unique coin published by A. Cunningham (*Coins of Ancient India*, Reprint, Varanasi 1969, Pl. IV, No. 15) as a coin of Rāja Vṛṣṇi has on the reverse a wheel and Kharoṣṭhī legend, and on the obverse a banner with a composite animal and a Brāhmī legend. J. Allan, (*Catalogue of the Coins of Ancient India*, Reprint, New Delhi, 1975, p. clv; Pl. XVI.5), dates the coin to the first century B.C. and presumes it belongs to the northern Punjab. Härtel, ("Early Vāsudeva Worship", p. 576, fn. 9) correctly associates the symbols with Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa and Saṃkarṣaṇa/Balarāma, respectively.

⁴¹ The legend *yūpalathikasa* occurs on the side of a seal (Joshi, "Mathurā", p. 168). Shri Joshi in a correspondence dated Sept. 4, 1985 explains the legend as *yūpa-yaṣṭhikasya* which may be interpreted as "carrier or maker of *yūpa*-posts" or, "born by grace of any specific sacrifice represented by the sacrificial post".

⁴² On inscriptions of the time of Śodāsa, the Kautsa gotra is mentioned in the Mathurā Jaina tablet inscription of the year 72 (see D.C. Sircar, *Select Inscriptions* Vol. I, pp. 120-121); the Śaigraha gotra is recorded on an inscription from Jamalpur mound (see Sircar, *Select Inscriptions* Vol. I, pp. 121-122) and on a Mathurā stone inscription (Mathura Museum No. 79.20).

⁴³ See Kalyani Das (Bajpayee), *Early Inscriptions of Mathurā - A Study*, Calcutta 1980, pp. 143-144.

⁴⁴ See Th. Damsteegt, "The Pre-Kuṣāṇa and Kuṣāṇa Inscriptions and the Supersession of Prākṛit by Sanskrit in North India in General and at Mathurā in Particular", *Mathurā: The Cultural Heritage*, p. 302.

⁴⁵ Sten Konow, "Mathurā Brāhmī Inscription of the Year 28", *Epigraphia Indica* XXI, 1931-32, Delhi, pp. 59-61.

shipped by Kuṣāṇa kings. The inscription, of the time of Huviṣka, states that at [the *sabhā* attached to]⁴⁶ the *devakula*, something was done for the Brahmans who were regular guests there. Vedic rituals continue to be performed in Mathurā during the Kuṣāṇa period. Of the two *yūpas* (Vedic sacrificial posts), found in the bed of the Yamunā at Mathurā, one, dating to the reign of Vāsiṣka, commemorates a Brahman's performance of the Dvādaśarātra rite and the setting up of the *yūpa*.⁴⁷ The Brahman who performed the rite belongs to the Bhāradvāja gotra, recording once again the presence of the important *gotra*-system. Vedic rituals and Brahmanic social structure are likely to have received additional support from Mathurā's Bhāgavatas. The Bhāgavatas are almost certain to have been upholders of the Brahmanic *varṇa* (or class) structure;⁴⁸ the Bhagavad Gītā unequivocally accepts the code of behavior derived from the *varṇāśrama* system.⁴⁹ The Bhāgavatas were probably also sympathetic (and at times actually supportive) of Vedic sacrifices. Inscriptional evidence from Rajasthan shows that the Vedic Aśvamedha sacrifice was performed in honour of Bhagavān Saṃkarṣaṇa and Vāsudeva.⁵⁰ There is no reason to suppose that the relations between Brahmanism and the Bhāgavata cult were very different in Rajasthan than in Mathurā, so the interrelation that is recorded in Rajasthan could well have also existed in Mathurā. One possible reason for the interrelation, or perhaps another factor to cement it, could be the incorporation of Bhāgavata gods into the Śrāddha, an important Vedic ritual.⁵¹ Tensions should have existed between the Brahmanic orthodoxy and the Buddhist community.⁵² But these strains, which can be gauged only indirectly, seem not to have impaired the vitality of Brahmanism.

The vital role Brahmanism played in determining the culture of Mathurā has only recently been highlighted.⁵³ It can now be said that a series of characteristics found in Mathurā primarily reflect Brahmanism and the values it fosters. A Sanskrit language preference, a *varṇa*-based society operating within (or having as ideal) the *varṇāśramadharmā* system,⁵⁴ [somewhat of] a predilection towards aniconism in the early (i.e. pre-Christian) phase of divine representations, and, a preference for the oral transmission of knowledge, all have their roots in Brahmanism.

Preference for oral transmission of knowledge should have been very strong in Mathurā. If this preference is postulated, a number of perplexing anomalies fall into place. The late start in the use of inscriptions at Mathurā, and their increase only under foreign rule

⁴⁶ H. Lüders, *Mathurā Inscriptions*, ed. by K.L. Janert, Göttingen, 1961, p. 145.

⁴⁷ Lüders, *Mathurā Inscriptions*, No. 94, pp. 125–126.

⁴⁸ Suvira Jaiswal, *The Origin and Development of Vaiṣṇavism*, New Delhi 1967, pp. 45–46.

⁴⁹ Cf. J.A.B. van Buitenen, transl., *The Bhagavad Gītā*, Chicago, 1981, p. 9.

⁵⁰ This is the Ghosunḍi Stone Inscription mentioned in Chapter 14, p. 196.

⁵¹ According to the Bhaviṣya Purāṇa, the offering of the rice balls in this ritual are as follows: Pradyumna receives the first, Saṃkarṣaṇa the second, Vāsudeva the third and the one making the offering considers himself as Aniruddha. Dr. Dakshina Ranjan Shastri, *Origin and Development of the Rituals of Ancestor Worship in India*, Calcutta, 1969, p. 175. Cf. D.M. Srinivasan, "Vaiṣṇava Art and Iconography at Mathurā", *Mathurā: The Cultural Heritage*, fn. 14.

⁵² See D.M. Srinivasan, "Introduction", *Mathurā: The Cultural Heritage*, p. xii, based on the paper of P.S. Jaini in the same volume, *quod vide*.

⁵³ D.M. Srinivasan, "Introduction", *Mathurā: The Cultural Heritage*, pp. xiii–xiv.

⁵⁴ So also K. Das (Bajpayee), *Early Inscriptions*, p. 132.

could have been due to a local preference for oral transmission of information. It is well known that the Mathurā corpus of inscriptions becomes very large under the Kuṣāṇas. Less well emphasized is the great imbalance between the number of Buddhist and Jain inscriptions and those having some kind of Brahmanic or Hindu content. Out of the total Kuṣāṇa inscriptions from Mathurā which number about 240 (as of 1989),⁵⁵ three, possibly four,⁵⁶ have some kind of Brahmanic or Hindu content.⁵⁷ In fact, out of the slightly less than 300⁵⁸ total number of Mathurā inscriptions falling between the Mauryan and Kuṣāṇa ages, only nine (or ten) record some Brahmanic or Hindu content.⁵⁹ The point is that this imbalance is not because Brahmanism and Hinduism had nothing to transmit. It is the long arm of the Vedic tradition with its preference, indeed insistence, on the oral transmission of sacred knowledge (*śruti*), that could well be instrumental in the rather remarkable imbalance. *Śruti* [lit. "that which is heard"], refers, of course, to the belief in the revelatory origin of Vedic knowledge and to the oral mode by which it is to be transmitted.⁶⁰ Oral transmission obviously exercises mnemonic, not writing, ability. Perhaps that explains why greater scriptural advances were made under foreign rule in Mathurā, and also why actors and Bhāgavata dramas could be nurtured there, early on.⁶¹ The practice of mnemonics and direct communication of knowledge affected a large margin of the Brahmanic and Hindu community. All those within the *varṇa* system, save the *sūdras*, would be potentially subjected to these methods of retaining and transmitting knowledge. To illustrate this point solely from the inscriptional evidence cited above, the twice-born who records his *gotra* must memorize it for use in the *gṛhya* and *śrauta* rituals he performs; the twice-born who erects a *yūpa* and performs the Dvādaśarātra ritual is instructed orally on his role in the performance and recites from memory in the ritual. The twice-born audience in attendance at any of the *gṛhya* or *śrauta* rites is always exposed to the reality of this manner of instruction and retention, and, most of all, to the prestige in so doing. The lesson to be learned at these occasions is that oral transmission has higher cultural prestige than written communication, and that lesson could well be a reason why Brahmanic and Hindu images so seldom carry inscriptions. It is not impos-

⁵⁵ I arrive at this number by adding to the 238 Kuṣāṇa inscriptions from Mathurā cited by Bajpayee (fn. 55), 2 more analyzed by Gérard Fussman, "Documents Epigraphiques Kouchans (V)", *BEFEO*, LXXVII, 1988, 5ff.

⁵⁶ The number depends upon whether one agrees with Norvin Hein (*The Miracle Plays of Mathurā*, Yale 1972, pp. 233-271), as I do, that inscription No. 27 in Lüders' *Mathurā Inscriptions*, has a Bhāgavata content.

⁵⁷ They are: 1) The Mathura Museum image of Kārttikeya, No. 2949, inscribed in the 11th year by four Kṣatriya brothers; 2) The Isāpur Yūpa Inscription of the year 24; 3) the Inscription of the year 28 recording the endowment of a *punyaśālā* etc. (*supra*); 4) the Jamālpur Stone Inscription (No. 27 in Lüders' *Mathurā Inscriptions*, mentioned above). Because of the last line in Lüders' Mathurā Inscription No. 99, it should be counted here too; see *supra* and fn. 45.

⁵⁸ I arrive at this number by adding 288 inscriptions cited by Bajpayee + 2 analyzed by Fussman (fn. 55), + 1 (Mathura Museum No. 79.20), discussed *inter alia* by R.C. Sharma, "New Inscriptions from Mathurā", *Mathurā: The Cultural Heritage*, pp. 308ff.

⁵⁹ Counting the above inscription as number "one", the others recording some Brahmanic or Hindu content are found in Bajpayee (Appendix) p. 172 (No. 22), p. 173 (Nos. 26 & 27), p. 178 (No. 15), p. 183 (No. 32), p. 184 (No. 36), p. 206 (No. 8), p. 207 (No. 13), plus probably p. 184 (No. 34).

⁶⁰ Cf. Louis Renou, *The Destiny of the Veda in India*, Reprint. Delhi 1965, Par. 25.

⁶¹ Cf. R.G. Bhandarkar, "Allusions to Krishna in Patañjali's Mahābhāṣya," *The Indian Antiquary* III (1874), 14-16. Norvin Hein, *Miracle Plays* (see fn. 56).

sible to imagine that the type of rote information found on Buddhist and Jain images (i.e. information citing who patronized the image and for what religious purpose) could have been recited at the installation of a Brahmanic or Hindu image and that this information could have been orally preserved by future progeny in their lineage [or other ritually prescribed] recitations.

The practice and prestige of direct communication of Brahmanic tenets are critical to the dawning of Brahmanic art. Neither copy books nor manuals nor treatises on iconography existed that this time to guide the Kuṣāṇa artisan. Were he commissioned to execute an image of four-armed Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa or a Mukhalinga, he would not have recourse to iconographic prescriptions such as we find in the Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa, the Bṛhat Saṃhitā, or the *śaiva* āgamas, cited previously. They all come later. Yet, no one seems to have had trouble conceptualizing what the basic formulae are in representing these images. Perusal of Mathurā's output of four-armed Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa images is impressive from the point of view of standardization in attributes, stance, dress, gestures. The same can be said for the Mukhalinga. Here is an image featuring one, or two or four heads of which the same two persist as the only heads chosen for the main (or easterly) direction on the Liṅga. Surely it must be considered extraordinary that iconographic ambivalency or experimentation is absent even though there are no iconographic texts and, in numbers of instances, no previous artistic models. Visual models, other than artistic ones, have already been postulated in looking for the advent of incipient art forms. Models from the ritual arena have been proposed. Oral models from literary recitations and performances existed and may also have helped to stabilize an iconographic language. Epic stories and ritual ceremonies, together, are the main sources for much of *śaiva* and *vaiṣṇava* iconography, including expressions of the multiplicity convention. Both of these sources communicate their contents orally, if not orally **and** visually.

It is impossible to ignore the high degree of correlation between descriptions in the Mahābhārata and their plastic expressions in the art of Mathurā. The Bhagavad Gītā is especially rich in imagery that attains crystallization in artistic forms. The above-mentioned four-armed Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa image is the plastic equivalent of the description in Bhagavad Gītā XI.46. The eight-armed form of the god recalls the section in the Gītā describing god's eightfold material nature (VII.7). Specific *avatāras* appearing in Mathurā are not mentioned in the Gītā, although the doctrine seems to be propounded there (cf. Bh. Gītā IV.7, 8). Further, most of the *avatāra* icons are based, not inappropriately on the Gītā's description of four-armed Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa, who represents the humane aspect of the divine.⁶² The icon of Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa on Garuḍa also reverts to the Gītā's description of four-armed Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa since it is but the seated version of the latter, standing model. The Gītā explains one symbol which is illustrated in Mathurā's *śaiva*

⁶² Cf. Chapter 11, p. 147. The exceptions are: Trivikrama who has eight arms in Kuṣāṇa and Gupta icons cited above (Chapter 18, pp. 248-249). Note that T.A.G. Rao (*Hindu Iconography* Vol. I, Pt. I, p. 164) states that Trivikrama can have four or eight arms. I understand this option to indicate that Trivikrama can have four arms like other *avatāras* or eight arms which from a symbolic point of view are so ideally suited to the myth engaging Trivikrama (see Chapter 18, p. 251). The other exception is the Keśivadha image (see discussion in Chapter 18, pp. 242-243).

forms. This is the third, or supranormal, eye needed for the apprehension of a vision beyond the grasp of the ordinary eyes. Specifically, the *Gītā* calls it the divine eye to behold yoga power (XI.8), an explanation particularly suitable for Śiva, the yogi *par excellence*. Besides the *Gītā*, there is Skanda's episode with Mahiṣa recounted in the *Mahābhārata*. Both Skanda's story and the characteristic number of his multiple heads may have had a major influence upon the iconography of the multi-armed Warrior Goddess.

All these forms, Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa, God as Primordial Matter, Avatāras, the Warrior Goddess, are either invented or elaborated upon in the Mathurā workshops during the Kuṣāṇa period. The main image of four-armed Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa builds upon an earlier unique *vaiṣṇava* image from Malhār. The four arms and the appearance of the mace and wheel held in the upper hands of the Malhār image connect it to images developed in the Mathurā workshops. Whereas it may be conjectured that the Malhār image represents Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa as a Mahā Vīra, there can be no doubt about the identification of the Mathurā images of this god. The iconography has been sufficiently developed, stabilized, and brought into line with the description in the *Gītā* to assure an identification. Moreover, the identification can be corroborated. The single images of this god corroborate with representations of the god within the Vṛṣṇi kinship reliefs, a genre probably invented at Mathurā. The portrayals of the god in the kinship reliefs, which beyond doubt identify him as the younger brother of Saṃkarṣaṇa/Balarāma, match his single four-armed images.

Mathurā's ability to invent or endow images with a mature iconography at the outset may well be due to the fact that the formulae were transmitted orally and that the environment fostered their oral transmission. Let us take the case of the seminal *Gītā*. The *Gītā* itself indicates that it should be transmitted orally. God describes his devotee as one "... devoted to me, enlightening one another and always recounting my stories ..." (*kathayantaś ca mām nityam* X.9).⁶³ The popularity of stories of the life and deeds of Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa and his kinsman Saṃkarṣaṇa/Balarāma comes from another, near contemporaneous source, Patañjali's *Mahābhāṣya* (dated circa mid second century B.C. to the beginning of the Christian era).⁶⁴ One of the stories mentioned in the *Mahābhāṣya* must have Mathurā as its setting; it is the episode of the killing of Kaṃṣa, king of Mathurā. This point is of more than passing interest since the text indicates that during its time such Kṛṣṇaite stories were being dramatized. The possibility that ancient Mathurā was a locale presenting Kṛṣṇaite dramas is strengthened by the researches of Norvin Hein (see fn. 56). In his analysis and interpretation of a Kuṣāṇa stone inscription he finds evidence in support of Vaiṣṇava dramas being performed in Mathurā during the Kuṣāṇa period. The probabil-

⁶³ van Buitenen, *Bhagavad Gītā*, p. 109. Norvin Hein proposes that this same passage may suggest that dance dramas requiring recitation may be counted among the ways a devotee could recount Kṛṣṇa's story (*Miracle Plays*, p. 259).

⁶⁴ See Bhandarkar, "Mahābhāṣya", 14–16. The date that van Buitenen gives for the *Gītā* (i.e. c. 200 B.C.) rather than the date given by Barbara S. Miller (*The Bhagavad Gita*, New York, 1986, p. 3; i.e. first century A.D.) is preferred due to the corroborating evidence from the *Mahābhāṣya* and the Kuṣāṇa (and pre-Kuṣāṇa) icons.

ity is high therefore that the populace at Mathurā saw dramatized stories about Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa and his lineage, and also heard epic stories recounting *inter alia* passages from the Gītā. Religious recitation, expositions, plays are the traditional methods of popular religious instruction throughout India.⁶⁵ It should have been so in ancient Mathurā as well. The methods of communication would have recalled the prestigious manner in which the Vedas are handed down and the way knowledge of rites and lineages are kept alive. Storytelling may have achieved additional recognition since the telling of tales was sometimes incorporated into the Vedic rituals themselves. Vedic literature describes certain soma sacrifices of twelve or more days of soma pressing which allot time to extra-Vedic activity within the ritual context. For example, descriptions of the Aśvamedha ritual show that during the year when the sacrificial horse wanders about freely, the king, who initiates the rite, listens as Brahman and Kṣatriya lute-players sing songs about the king's heroic exploits. In addition, the hotṛ priest, who is surrounded by bands of lute-players and other officiating priests, each day tells cyclic narratives of ancient kings which last the whole year.⁶⁶ These types of soma sacrifices (called *sattras*), have breaks in the daily ritual activity and the breaks can be filled with narratives, etc.⁶⁷ The Dvādaśarātra ritual, which can be situated by inscriptional evidence in Kuṣāṇa Mathurā, belongs to this type. This fact bodes well for the status and respect that may have been accorded to praiseworthy stories and storytellers in ancient Mathurā.

Today an audience in the presence of a respected storyteller or religious dramatization shares in an impressive cultural experience. R.K. Narayan sketches the world of the storyteller as he knew it in 1964.⁶⁸ The storyteller is the village pandit, steeped in the study of Sanskrit and the authority of the Vedas. Regulating his own life by the śāstric prescriptions, he is sought out by the people as the respected repository of epic and purāṇic lore. As the living model of the Brahmanic-Hindu tradition, he is the effective means by which the tradition is communicated. Kirin Narayan concludes from her fieldwork in the 1980s that storytelling is the very fabric of a religion.⁶⁹ From her experience at the feet of a Hindu storytelling Swami in the pilgrimage town of Nasik she can draw the conclusion that stories [together with other oral means of transmitting religious teachings] keep the message fresh. Stories, rituals, dramatic performances breathe life and relevancy into ancient beliefs. Religious meanings remain contemporaneous with each oral encounter and an evolving continuum in religious ideology is promoted. Norvin Hein, in the 50's registers a similar role for the *vaiṣṇava* dramas performed in Mathurā. The dramas are geared to the needs of non-readers. For them, the religious plays are the effective means by which Hindu culture is conveyed and by which religious beliefs and

⁶⁵ V. Raghavan, "Methods of Popular Religious Instruction in South India", *Traditional India: Structure and Change*, ed. Milton Singer, Philadelphia, 1959, pp. 30ff.

⁶⁶ Cf. R.C. Hazra, "The Aśvamedha, The Common Source of Origin of the Purāṇa Pañca-Lakṣaṇa and the Mahābhārata", *Annals of the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute*, Vol. 36, parts III-IV; 190-203.

⁶⁷ See C.Z. Minkowski, "Janamejaya's *Sattra* and Ritual Structure", *JAOS* Vol. 109.3 (1989), 416ff.

⁶⁸ R.K. Narayan, *Gods, Demons, and Others*, New York, 1964, pp. 1-10.

⁶⁹ Kirin Narayan, *Storytellers, Saints, and Scoundrels. Folk Narrative in Hindu Religious Teaching*, Philadelphia, 1989.

experiences are communicated.⁷⁰ It does not strain the imagination to envision similar situations in ancient Mathurā. Then as now, illiterates and literates could have gathered round narrators or actors (or both). These performers could knit an audience together by imparting common cultural, especially religious, experiences. The stories and visual images of Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa could well have been part of the repertoire. In this way, the same religious ideas and their standard visual expressions could have been transmitted to a large segment of an interested populace. There is no reason why audiences in Mathurā would not include the very people directly responsible for Brahmanical imagery: the artisans and their potential patrons. Both these groups, if this line of reasoning is correct, would then be exposed to the same stories and descriptions of the divine. Such communal experiences imparted, in short, the basis for a common symbolic language upon which a rather stable and mature iconography could be built from the outset. Gatherings around a story teller or epic bard⁷¹ were not of course limited to Mathurā; such gatherings would have been duplicated in many different towns and villages, forming thereby another network [in addition to the aforementioned pilgrimage network]. This would be a network of communities perhaps sharing bards, travelling actors and the resultant religious experiences and religious symbols these personages impart. It may be conjectured, but I do not think it is too far off the mark, that storytellers and actors [in addition to the aforementioned ritualists] helped forge a cultural bonding which prepared for the immediate acceptance of a religious iconography in regions beyond the place of its origin. In effect, the performing media in ancient India, disseminated a sophisticated symbolic language among a wide segment of the population and this dissemination enabled a complex, symbolic iconography to be represented and accepted from the outset.

The roles of the storyteller and actor come to the fore in communicating ideas relevant to *vaiṣṇava* iconography, whereas the role of the ritualist seems to dominate in the formulation of incipient *śaiva* iconography. In particular, the *śrauta* Agnicayana and the *grhya* Saṃdhyā rituals are good candidates for the oral transmission of symbols incorporated into *śaiva* art. Here again comes evidence suggesting that it is more profitable to view Rudra-Śiva as an insider to the Brahmanic tradition; were it otherwise, one would need to explain why two fundamentally Brahman rituals could stimulate the iconography of an outsider to the tradition.

Sections of the Mahānārāyaṇa Upaniṣad concerned with the Śiva Reality could have been employed in the Saṃdhyā ritual. Performance of Saṃdhyā was a sacred duty and there would be no dearth of practitioners in a city such as Mathurā, lying within Brahmārṣideśa (see Chapter 1). The Mahānārāyaṇa Upaniṣad is basically a breviary dating around the Christian era. The text, it bears repeating, contains in verses 277–285 the five names that the later tradition assigns to each of the five faces of the Pañcamukha Liṅga.⁷² It can be deduced from the Āgamas that the Pañcamukha Liṅga is believed to

⁷⁰ N. Hein, *Miracle Plays*, pp. 1–14.

⁷¹ A bardic tradition is associated with the Mahābhārata from its inception; cf. J.A.B. van Buitenen, *The Mahābhārata* Vol. I, pp. xxiii–xxiv.

⁷² See discussions in Chapters 10 and 19.

be the initial manifestation of the Śiva Reality called Sadāśiva. Can it be accidental that verse 286 in the Mahānārāyaṇa Upaniṣad, that is, the verse following the set of verses containing the five names, knows of a god called Sadāśiva? The answer is “no” because of the following evidence. After the last name is recited in verse 285, it is stated: *brahmā śivo me astu sa eva sadāśiva om*. “May Brahman⁷³ [the individualized Brāhman] be gracious (*śiva*) to me, he who is indeed Sadāśiva”. The embodied, or individualized aspect of Brāhman, here called Sadāśiva, is already mentioned in the Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad, in a manner anticipating later thought and iconography. The Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad stipulates that the Higher Brahman has a lower, embodied form.⁷⁴ The same Upaniṣad states that the form born of the Higher Brahman is Rudra who is *sarvatomukha* (i.e. “having a face in every direction”).⁷⁵ One of the positions of the Upaniṣad is that Rudra *sarvatomukha* is the lower form of the Higher Brahman. The literary image could concur with the image of a Mukhalinga since the lower, concretized form of Brahman is a divinity having a head in every direction. This Upaniṣadic position anticipates well the conceptualization of Sadāśiva in the Mahānārāyaṇa Upaniṣad, especially if Sadāśiva is considered to be the concluding name given to the entity whose five separate names are given in verses 277–285. The verses preceding the five so-called Pañcamukha names (nos. 270–276), form a set of prayers called “Sarvaliṅga” (i.e. comprising all liṅga-s, verse 276) in which the “liṅga” nature of the divine is praised. This means that the so-called Pañcamukha verses (nos. 277–285) are directly preceded by verses giving homage to god’s “liṅga” nature and that they are directly followed by a verse naming Sadāśiva. Next follow the set of verses giving adoration to names of god that sound like names of *mūrtis*.⁷⁶ The name of “Maheśa” (the later acknowledged source of all subsequent manifestations), is not included here, but the other names presume the unfolded full-figure of the Śiva Reality, namely Maheśa. This sequence in the Mahānārāyaṇa Upaniṣad testifies to the incipient stage of the three *śaiva* typologies (i.e. Liṅga, Mukhalinga and Full Anthropomorphic Form) found in later religious texts and art.⁷⁷ The unusual aspect of early *śaiva* art in Mathurā is that it displays these three typologies. It is proposed that knowledge of the rudimentary typologies could have been orally transmitted through memorization and performance of the Saṃdhyā ritual, one of the few rituals cited by name in this Upaniṣad. Reference to Saṃdhyā occurs in Verse 333. There are some indications that this Upaniṣad may have been familiar to performers of Saṃdhyā. First, a series of verses (Nos. 317–386), following closely after the aforementioned *śaiva* litany are mantras used in the daily Saṃdhyā ceremonies.⁷⁸ Second, throughout the text are scattered verses used in various components of this ritual.⁷⁹ Third, among the Southern Śaivas, the *nyāsa* invocation preceding the

⁷³ Cf. the commentary of Jean Varenne (*La Mahā Nārāyaṇa Upaniṣad*, Tome I, Deuxième Edition, Paris, 1986, p. 153) on the gender, but not on the interpretation of *brahmān*, where he is probably wrong.

⁷⁴ See Chapter 9, pp. 97–99.

⁷⁵ See Chapter 9, p. 109, re: Śvet. Up. 2.16.

⁷⁶ See discussion in Chapter 19, p. 271.

⁷⁷ A later anonymous commentator states that vss. 270–276 could have been used to consecrate the Liṅga; see Jean Varenne, *La Mahā Nārāyaṇa Upaniṣad*, I, p. 153.

⁷⁸ Varenne, *Mahā Nārāyaṇa Upaniṣad*, I, p. 79. Cf. pp. 154–155.

⁷⁹ E.g. MNU vss. 124–129 are from RV 10.9.1–3 which occur in Mārjana; vss. 143–148 = RV 10.190

actual Saṃdhyā recitation, includes the recitation of the so-called Pañcamukha verses (i.e. vss. 277ff.) from the Mahānārāyaṇa Upaniṣad.⁸⁰ *Nyāsa* is a ritual component of Saṃdhyā wherein the worshipper installs prayers and/or parts of god into his own body so as to render it pure and ritually fit to perform the ensuing devotions; in modern times, installation is done with the right hand having the ring-finger adorned with a ring made of *kuśa* grass.⁸¹ It is called the *pavitra* (i.e. purifier) ring.⁸² The term *pavitra* occurs in verse 276 of the Mahānārāyaṇa Upaniṣad (the verse preceding the verses 277 *et al.* used in the modern *nyāsa* of the Southern Śaivas). Verse 276 declares that the Sarvaliṅga prayers install using the hand as purifier (*pavitra*). The wording of verse 276 and its prefatory position vis-à-vis the Pañcamukha verses could indicate knowledge of some sort of rite anticipating, or already connected with, a ritual component of Saṃdhyā. The core of Saṃdhyā is an ancient ritual, probably older than descriptions of it in the ancient Gṛhyasūtras.⁸³ It is an important daily ritual included in the Brahma-Yajña, or sacrifice to Brahman, which constitutes one of the Five Great Sacrifices (Pañca Mahāyajña) a twice-born householder must perform. To indicate the antiquity of these Sacrifices, suffice it to say that reference to the Five Great Sacrifices is already contained in the Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa. Saṃdhyā's core components were already well in place before the third century A.D. It seems fair to propose that a householder belonging to the School of the Black Yajurveda could have been familiar with the Saṃdhyā verses in the Mahānārāyaṇa Upaniṣad⁸⁴ which may have included the "Sarvaliṅga" set and the "Sadāśiva" set. I would like to say, but dare not, that a householder could have been more than familiar with the text; I would like to say that he could have used sections as the breviary for his daily Saṃdhyā ceremony. Especially the householder dedicated both to fulfilling his Brahmanic obligations and to the worship of Śiva may have been well served by a text like the Mahānārāyaṇa Upaniṣad. But whatever text was used to instruct the householder on the way to perform Saṃdhyā, one thing is sure, the instruction would have been given orally, committed to memory and applied daily. Were the Mahānārāyaṇa *śaiva* verses employed or perused in connection with this ritual they could have introduced the worshipper to the rudimentary notions of the three *śaiva* typologies.⁸⁵

What shape can the first typology assume? The Liṅga has the shape of the phallus

which occur in the Aghamarṣaṇa; vs. 472 occurs in the Prāṇāyāma; see D.M. Srinivasan, "Saṃdhyā", pp. 176–177.

⁸⁰ C.D. Diehl, *Instrument and purpose*, Lund, 1956, pp. 75ff.

⁸¹ See Sir M. Monier-Williams, *Brahmanism and Hinduism*, London, 1891, p. 338.

⁸² Putting on the *pavitra* ring and ensuing hand gestures are recorded in the documentary film *The Hindu Ritual Saṃdhyā*, produced by D.M. Srinivasan, Dist. by Penn. State University, Audio-Visual Services.

⁸³ On the older Saṃdhyā myth enacted in the Saṃdhyā ritual see Doris Meth Srinivasan, "Saṃdhyā: Myth and Ritual", *Indo-Iranian Journal* Vol. XV, No. 3, 1973, 161ff. On the core of the Saṃdhyā ritual, see 166ff.

⁸⁴ The Vedic School, or *śākhā*, the worshipper belongs to, determines the principal emphasis of his Saṃdhyā devotions; see Srinivasan, "Saṃdhyā: Myth and Ritual", p. 167. The Mahānārāyaṇa Upaniṣad belongs to the School of the Black Yajurveda.

⁸⁵ Even if the related verses pertain mainly to the Mukhaliṅga typology (i.e. vss. 277–285) and the Liṅga typology (vss. 270–276), the third or Mūrti typology, following directly after the Sadāśiva verse of 286, is likely also to be, on that account, recognized.

indicative that all creation flows from the transcendental. This meaning for "Linga" is associated with the phallus of Śiva in an epic story. The story, contained in the Sautika Parvan, tells the tale of Śiva's creative urge without undue mystification.⁸⁶ There can be no doubt that Śiva's sign, or "linga" is his phallus and that it is emblematic of his capacity for cosmic creation. Bearing this in mind, the fact that Śiva tears off his own phallus upon finding that creation has already been accomplished when he emerged from the waters, is fraught with symbolic imagery. The imagery carries forward an image already established in an Atharva Vedic myth. Herein it is a question of a golden phallus standing in the water and representing an unseen creator.⁸⁷ Both the Atharva Veda and the epic foster an image which represents precisely what it is meant to symbolize. Neither keen insight, nor absolute faith, nor secret instruction is needed to understand the symbol. Neither do these literary sources imply the paradox that Westerners may perceive, namely representing the unseen by a visual sign.⁸⁸ The direct correspondence between the imagery in the epic and the image of the Linga stuck in the ground is not hard to see. Whether there was in fact a *quid pro quo* correspondence between the two cannot be stated with certainty, but if there was any kind of stimulus going from literary image to artistic image then it may again be the handiwork of the epic bards, helping in that transposition.

The shape of the Mukhalinga, specifically the Pañcamukha Linga, is in many ways affected by the ritual elements in the Agnicayana.⁸⁹ It is not possible to situate an Agnicayana in ancient Mathurā. A bird-shaped altar is characteristic of this śrauta ritual⁹⁰ and a bird-shaped altar has been found at the outskirts of Kauśāmbī. Whether it was used, as the excavator of Kauśāmbī claims, to perform a Puruṣamedha, or whether it was used for an Agnicayana, or none of these, there does remain the fact that a bird-shaped altar was found in the vicinity of the locale producing the earliest Pañcamukha Linga known to date. Bhītā is in close proximity to Kauśāmbī; it is on the left bank of the Yamunā⁹¹ and Kauśāmbī is on the right. Today a boat can easily go from one place to the other within a day. In ancient times, riverine traffic should have been easy and natural too.⁹² Mathurā was in contact with both Kauśāmbī and Bhītā in pre-Śuṅga and Śuṅga times.⁹³ In Kuṣāṇa times, this contact permitted traffic in art. Two Buddha heads were found at Kauśāmbī which indicate contact with the Mathurā school. One head is made of the Mathurā sandstone and the other reflects the Mathurā style in the type of

⁸⁶ For the full story, see Chapter 17, p. 232.

⁸⁷ For an analysis and background of the mythic image see Chapter 17, p. 232.

⁸⁸ Hélène Brunner addressed this question very well in her publication "Toujours Le Niskala-Linga," *Journal Asiatique* 256, 1968, 445-447.

⁸⁹ Chapters 14 & 17 address this point.

⁹⁰ Cf. F. Staal, *The Science of Ritual*, Poona 1982; especially Chapter III "Aviary Geometry of the Agnicayana".

⁹¹ Today Bhītā mound is less than one kilometer from the bank of the Yamunā. The farm plots situated between the mound and the river do not form a barrier today. It is not possible to envision that a barrier existed in ancient times.

⁹² A pottery type common to Kauśāmbī and Bhītā (and other Gangetic sites) affirms some sort of connection between the two. See G.R. Sharma, *Kauśāmbī*, p. 64.

⁹³ Distribution of beads and anthropomorphic pots establish the connections (*supra*).

kapardin Buddha depicted.⁹⁴ Contact was probably not limited to Buddhist art and traffic probably did not go one way only; therefore it is possible that the Mathurā school could have had knowledge of innovations in Brahmanic art stemming from the region, including the development of the Pañcamukha Liṅga at Bhīṭā. It should not be forgotten that already in pre-Kuṣāṇa times, the Ekamukha Liṅgas fashioned in Mathurā showed the same Mukhas as appeared on the Bhīṭā Pañcamukha Liṅga. This selectivity suggests contact and/or access to the same theoretical underpinnings, religious in nature. Influences could have travelled along the above-mentioned Mathurā-Kauśāmbī passageway (into which Bhīṭā could be pulled without difficulty) by way of pilgrims, traders or performers travelling along routes that overlap. What the Mathurā workshops accomplished in Kuṣāṇa times was to innovate and develop new Mukhalinga forms without upsetting or supplanting the theoretical model.

There are some epic descriptions that definitely characterize Maheśa, the third typology, but his actual form in Kuṣāṇa art reminds of the early Mahā Yakṣa forms. The sort of information contained in the Anuśāsana Parvan of the Mahābhārata pertains uniquely to Maheśa in later texts. For example, mention is made of the great god “making a body for himself, to bear that body and to be embodied”; we may recognize here the notion that Maheśa is the embodied form of god. The text knows that god emits from his body the forms of Brahmā and Viṣṇu; and, that he has four faces oriented in the quadrants.⁹⁵ Whereas these notions are central to Maheśa, they are not, apparently, sufficient to inspire image-making; the descriptions give equal weight to analytical and visual concepts. Looking at a Kuṣāṇa form of Maheśa (e.g. Pl. 19.5), the four faces are present, Brahmā and Viṣṇu are absent and the overall impression of the embodied form itself, its stance, gesture, dress, ithyphallic nature evoke the pre-Kuṣāṇa standing Śiva seen on the side of the Mūsānagar pillar (Pl. 17.12) and the colossal Śiva Ūrdhvaretas found at Rṣikeśa but probably produced in Mathurā (Pl. 17.10). It is the form of the latter image that evokes quite strongly a Yakṣa antecedent. Since the Yakṣa element can still be felt in the Kuṣāṇa Maheśa images, it is suggested that the shape of Maheśa has artistic precedents, though his specific multi-headed trait may not.

Why Mathurā (or, the greater Mathurā region), was the sole producer of icons of the Warrior Goddess is perhaps the least enigmatic aspect of her imagery. It does not take much perspicacity to promote the illogical argument that the Warrior Goddess betrays much that is foreign and indigenous in her iconography and there is only one art center during the Kuṣāṇa period where these two inputs could be translated into art forms. The argument is illogical because it uses as evidence that which it is trying to explain. Nevertheless it is true that only in Mathurā were local artisans available to give expression to the religious needs of foreign rulers who had settled in their midst and to local personages open to their ideas. Why? Mathurā's own soil contained a seed extremely receptive, I would think, to the growth of a cult to the Warrior Goddess. Mathurā had, as was already mentioned, the conditions for honouring Heroes and indeed, Mathurā had by

⁹⁴ See G.R. Sharma, *History to Prehistory*, Allahabad, 1980, pp. 35–36.

⁹⁵ These points are also taken up in Chapter 11.C, pp. 151–152.

the time of the Kuṣāṇas, a long established tradition for honouring the Vṛṣṇi Vīras. A Goddess who successfully overcomes a great buffalo (as in Type 2 icons), or who stands with weaponry evocative of that event (as in Type 1 icons), can be readily appreciated as a Hero-ine, and thereby associated with systems of thought familiar to Hero and Heroine Worship. It should not be forgotten that the Vṛṣṇis Heroes had a sister, Ekānaṃśā, who was a true Heroine in the *Harivaṃśa*.⁹⁶ Mathurā's ateliers responded well to the needs of devotees to the Vṛṣṇi Vīras, judging from the numerous reliefs and statues that have survived. In general, Mathurā's ateliers were used to executing the needs of the social class from which such devotees would come. That class is the martial class known as the Kṣatriyas. The Kṣatriyas were vigorous patrons of art in Mathurā. The historical Buddha and Vardhamāna were Kṣatriyas and their devotees in Mathurā (as well as elsewhere) would certainly be drawn from this class, as well as the mercantile (or vaiśya) class. Kṣatriyas also patronized Hindu art. There is the interesting inscription on a Mathurā statue of Kārttikeya which mentions that the patrons of the image are four brothers who are Kṣatriyas.⁹⁷ The interest lies, of course, in the fact that Skanda/Kārttikeya is unquestionably a mythological warrior god (one of his epithets is Mahāsena) whose battle with a Mahiṣa in the epic, and whose characteristic number "six" in the multiplicity convention are also features associated with the Warrior Goddess. Local Kṣatriya patronage of a Warrior Goddess can be imagined without too much difficulty.⁹⁸ In addition, the Kuṣāṇa rulers would, no doubt, have identified with (associated with, or, have been recruited into) this class with the result that the ateliers of Mathurā, already adept in responding to needs and patronage of this class, would have continued to do so. As regards the "retarded Animal Style" associated with some depictions of Mahiṣa, here too the explanation deals specifically with conditions in Mathurā. The Śaka Kṣatrapas from the Northwest who ruled in Mathurā before the Kuṣāṇas, Mahākṣatrapa Rajuvula and his successors, could have introduced the artistic conventions of their ancestors to the artisans of the town by means of the royal heirlooms they carried with them; this nomadic art decorates portable items such as jewelry, textiles and emblems of authority. The concert of all these conditions prevalent in Mathurā – incipient art center, climate receptive to the cult of Heroes, vigorous Kṣatriya patronage of art, artisans exposed to nomadic conventions and, artisans practiced or facile in assimilating a variety of foreign symbols into an integrated symbolic statement – does not seem to have existed in other places where the Kuṣāṇas settled in the subcontinent even though other places featured Hero worship (e.g. Taxila), or worship of Skanda/Kārttikeya (e.g. Taxila), or exposure to the Śakas (Taxila), or workshops of some renown (e.g. the Bhīṭā/Kauśāmbī area). The networks for spreading

⁹⁶ Chapter 16, pp. 213–214, where a comparison between the stance etc. of Ekānaṃśā and the Warrior Goddess is made. Note that in the *Harivaṃśa*, one name of the Devī is Ekānaṃśā. Right after this epithet, the text states that the Devī has six faces. (See Langlois, *Harivaṃśa* II, p. 217 (Lecture 175). It is Saṣṭhī, associated with Skanda/Kārttikeya – and not Ekānaṃśā, nor Mahiṣāsūramardīnī, nor any other major forms of the Devī – who has six faces. So, in the passage there are two aspects of the Devī, mentioned side-by-side which are absorbed by the Warrior Goddess. Like Ekānaṃśā, she is a heroine. Like Saṣṭhī, she is associated with the number "6".

⁹⁷ See fn. 57.

⁹⁸ von Stietencron exploring another angle, comes to the same conclusion in "Mahiṣāsūramardīnī", 137.

the resultant sophisticated, symbolic imagery of the Warrior Goddess would probably not be operating effectively for a deity like her. Pilgrimage networks or routes along which bards and performers travelled are unlikely to be accessible or effective as communicatory arteries for a Goddess having no roots in the religious institutions related to these networks. Such circumstances would effectively limit the initial acceptance of the Warrior Goddess to the Mathurā locale, causing the town's monopoly of images depicting the Warrior Goddess.

CHAPTER TWENTY TWO

EPILOGUE

EXCEPTIONS THAT PROVE THE RULE, EXCEPTIONS THAT DON'T

If there is a general rule, an underlying thread, that sews together the iconographic evidence presented in this book, it is this: forms of a cosmic deity are associated with the multiplicity convention because of a biological world view of creation. The earliest religious writings promoted the idea that creation is conception. A creator god creates by emitting forms that he contains within himself. That view, more than any other, prepared the ground for acceptance of a creator deity having multiple bodily parts. That is not to say that a Kuṣāṇa image of a multi-armed deity, for example, presupposes the belief of disengaged multiple arms inside the deity who then emits them. It is to say that if the abiding validity for the perception were to be sought, it would be found anchored to the Brahmanic vision of god as the Pregnant Male. The specific meanings attributed to the multiple bodily parts of an image are symbolic, not literal in content. The number of parts expresses a symbolic concept based more on the language of that number, than its mathematical quantity. Bodily parts, too, carry symbolic connotations. Therefore, an exception to the rule is one where there is absence of either a cosmic deity or a symbolic meaning in a work showing the presence of the multiplicity convention. To be precise, a deity who is not a cosmic creator but who is associated, in the art, with the multiplicity convention is an exception. But if the multiplicity convention of such a deity can be explained by other than symbolic factors, it becomes an exception that proves the rule. A deity who is not associated with the multiplicity convention but who is also not a cosmic creator becomes not so much an exception, but rather an example that proves the rule. A deity, though not a cosmic deity, having the multiplicity convention, is an exception. But if that deity is a creator god, it is an exception that does not entirely disprove the rule. Another exception is a secondary deity associated with the multiplicity convention having symbolic meaning. This is indeed an exception that disproves the rule.

With our definitions thus in tow, let us now proceed to look at some other Kuṣāṇa images.

A

The Buddha Śākyamuni

The fact that the first images of the Buddha, both from Mathurā and Gandhāra, do not exhibit multiple bodily parts, is in accordance with the rule noted above. In the parlance adopted here, it is an example which proves the rule.

It has now been convincingly shown by Herbert Härtel that Mathurā and Gandhāra began quite differently in their concertization of the Buddha. The art of Gandhāra portrayed

him as a "Meditative Being, as a real Buddha. . . ." ¹ The art of Mathurā portrayed him as an ideal Being. In the religio-cultural context of the Gangetic Valley, that ideal was based upon the Mahāpuruṣa (i.e. the Great Male), in the form of the Universal King or Cakravartin. ²

Size was one way to express the Mahāpuruṣa ideal. It has long been recognized that many of the early Buddhas from Mathurā are large and of heroic and vigorous proportions. This is, I believe, a selective manner of representation having less to do with the down-to-earth nature of the Mathurā style (as it is so often stated), and more to do with the representation of Buddha as a Mahāpuruṣa, a great and powerful Being. Large size, frontal stance with feet somewhat splayed and firmly planted on the ground, a full body, outward gaze plus specific features noted by Härtel (such as the 'vyāvṛtta mudrā' of the right hand and the left hand often held as a fist on the left thigh of a seated image, the chowrie-bearing attendants, the lion throne etc.) are all visual expressions of sovereignty. ³ It is by these visual referents to kingship that Mathurā artisans succeeded in conveying the Buddha as Mahāpuruṣa-Cakravartin. ⁴

There are aspects of this ideal which connect the Buddha to Brahmanic symbolism. Certainly the notion of the Large Puruṣa can be traced back to the Bṛhad Āraṇyaka Upaniṣad where the large dimensions proclaim the supra-normal distinctiveness of the personage. The large Puruṣa is a "somebody" who has, in this Upaniṣad, a seminal creative nature. ⁵ The cosmic implications of the large Puruṣa in the Bṛhad Āraṇyaka Upaniṣad, can of course, be traced back even further, to the Cosmic Male, Puruṣa, in the Rig Veda. ⁶ It is however, this quality of cosmic creativeness which seems to be absent in both the early art and texts dealing with the Buddha.

The Buddha appears as a Mahāpuruṣa not because he is "large" with the world inside his body (as a Pregnant Male); he is large because he is great with the signs of the Universal Ruler (Cakravartin) upon his body. This is an important distinction.

Every student of Buddhism knows that wonderful moment in the life of the royal babe when the sage Asita, on a visit to the palace, perceives the signs on the infant's body and proclaims "Unrivalled of all mankind is he, supreme". ⁷ The interpretation of the signs is given in an early Buddhist text, the Buddhacarita (circa first century A.D.):

¹ Herbert Härtel, "The Concept of the Kapardin Buddha Type of Mathura", *South Asian Archaeology* 1983, Naples 1986, p. 673.

² A recent paper argues that the Kapardin type developed in Mathurā represents Gautama not as Buddha but as the Bodhisattva after enlightenment. See Ju-Hyung Rhi, "From Bodhisattva to Buddha, The Beginning of Iconic Representation in Buddhist Art", *Artibus Asia*, Vol. LIV, 3/4, 1994, 207ff. The thesis is unconvincing. Since too much evidence is circumstantial, it cannot controvert that there are examples of the Kapardin type inscribed as "Buddha", and that the cultural personality of Mathurā needs also to be taken into account.

³ Härtel, "Kapardin Buddha", pp. 665-673.

⁴ Both the ideal and its visual referents of expression continued in India; see David L. Snellgrove, gen. ed. *The Image of the Buddha*, New Delhi 1978, p. 285.

⁵ See Chapter 8, pp. 84-86; re: BĀU I.4.1-7.

⁶ See Chapter 8, p. 85; Chapter 2, pp. 25-26.

⁷ E.J. Thomas, transl. *Early Buddhist Scriptures*, London, 1935, p. 3; from the *Nālaka-sūtra Suttanipāta*, 679-98.

l. 34: According to the signs found on this excellent one, the brilliance of gold and the radiance of a lamp, he will certainly become either an enlightened seer or a Cakravartin monarch on earth among men.⁸

A Cakravartin is recognized by his 32 characteristic external markings of a Mahāpuruṣa (*dvātriṃśan mahāpuruṣalakṣānāni*) and the eighty secondary characteristics (*aṣṭi anuvyañ janāni*).⁹ These signs are the ones found "on this excellent one". The Buddha himself shows these signs on his body to the monks before his entrance into the state of Parinirvāṇa. It is learned from the Sanskrit, Tibetan and Chinese versions of the *Mahāparinirvāṇa sūtra* that the Tathagāta removes his garment in order to show his special markings of a Cakravartin. He does this, Roth concludes, because he wishes to legitimize his claim for funeral rites accorded to a Cakravartin.¹⁰

None of the early images have recourse to multiple bodily parts because the significance of this convention does not relate to the Buddha's nature. The Buddha is a Great Being, he is not a cosmic creator. As such, his Mahāpuruṣa nature is captured by his massiveness and vigour; his Cakravartin nature is conveyed by his bodily markings, and, his Buddha nature is expressed by his meditative pose. Buddhist iconography displays its own symbolic vocabulary to communicate the supra-normal, or, supra-human nature of this Great Being. It is a vocabulary devoid of the multiplicity convention. If the multiplicity convention were used to distinguish one deity from another, or, if it functioned to suggest the powers and possible actions of a god, or even, if it evoked the complex, multifaceted nature of the divine,¹¹ it could find a place in the iconography of the early Buddha images. But this is not the case. The inappropriateness of the multiplicity convention for the image of a Buddha, must, I would maintain, stem from its prime association with cosmic creativity.¹²

This having been said, it is instructive to cast a glance at later Buddha images that purport to represent the cosmic nature of the Buddha. With the advent of belief in the cosmic nature of Buddha Śākyamuni as well as other Buddhas, symbols, but not multiple bodily parts, express the supernatural, cosmic powers. The mural painting of the Balawaste Buddha is an excellent example. The Buddha's entire upper torso is bare but covered with signs. Three of them represent, according to Jera-Bezard and M. Maillard, the jewels of a Cakravartin.¹³ The *śrīvatsa* on his chest is a mark of a Mahāpuruṣa. The Balawaste image could well represent the Cosmic Buddha Vairocana as the Great Being in the

⁸ *The Buddhacarita*, Pt. II. transl. by E.H. Johnston, Reprint. 2nd Edition. New Delhi, 1972, p. 8.

⁹ See G. Roth, "The Physical Presence of the Buddha and its Representation in Buddhist Literature", *Investigating Indian Art*, edited by M. Yaldiz and W. Lobo, Berlin, 1987, p. 295.

¹⁰ Roth, "Physical Presence", pp. 293–295.

¹¹ The point is that these have all been suggested as an underlying usage of the multiplicity convention, and they are all wanting; see Chapter 1.

¹² In this connection it is interesting to observe with Eva K. Dargyay's communication on the Tibetan Buddhist text *Kun byed rgyal po'i mdo*, that the innovative feature in this text is precisely the formulation of a symbolic image of a creator god for the philosophic concept of *bodhicitta* ("The Concept of a 'Creator God' in Tantric Buddhism", *The Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies*, Vol. 8.1, 1985, 31–47).

¹³ R. Jera-Bezard, M. Maillard, "Remarks on Early Esoteric Buddhist Painting in Central Asia", *Investigating Indian Art*, (see fn. 9 for full biblio. ref.), pp. 150–151.

guise of a Cakravartin. To A.F. Howard's recent thesis, proposing that this image represents the cosmological Buddha Śākyamuni and not Vairocana, Jera-Bezard and Maillard deftly observe that these are actually appearances of the same entity according to *The Three-fold Lotus Sūtra*.¹⁴ The Balawaste Buddha, in any case, exhibits his cosmic nature by symbols developed within the Buddhist tradition. The display of markings on the body is directly linked to the notion that the special signs of the Universal Ruler appear on his skin.

A series of rather early cosmological Buddhas from Central Asia and China exhibit yet another way to express the cosmic nature. None use the multiplicity convention. The series comprises images of the Buddha garbed in a dress depicting representations of the upper and lower worlds.¹⁵ This depiction also stems from the Buddhist tradition. The aforementioned *Mahāparinirvāṇa sūtra*, an early Buddhist canonical text, contains an account of a special dress indicating transfiguration. At the end of his life when the Buddha journeys to his final resting place, Kuśinagara, a devout layman offers him splendid garments. The Buddha puts them on. A sudden radiance occurs which seems to announce the transfiguration of Śākyamuni. When Ānanda asks the reason for this miraculous transformation, the Buddha answers that it is a sign of his immanent passing into Parinirvāṇa.¹⁶ This account shows that dress, or, dressing oneself in special robes, can be a metaphor indicative of a transfigured state.¹⁷ A dress depicting the upper and lower worlds is a special dress in Buddhist art. It is not difficult to imagine, in view of an account such as that in the *Mahāparinirvāṇa*, that it could represent "cosmic attire" befitting a cosmic Buddha.¹⁸

¹⁴ Jera-Bezard, M. Maillard, "Esoteric Buddhist Painting", p. 156, fn. 14.

¹⁵ These Buddhas are analyzed by A.F. Howard, *The Imagery of the Cosmological Buddha*, Leiden, 1986; Jera-Bezard, M. Maillard, "Esoteric Buddhist Painting". For a recent discussion on the difficulties of dating these images and the uncertainties in identifying them, see Marianne Yaldiz, *Archäologie und Kunstgeschichte Chinesisch-Zentralasiens (Xinjiang)*, Brill, 1987, pp. 87–90.

¹⁶ Snellgrove, *Image*, pp. 18–19.

¹⁷ Probably the artistic expression of the *Sambhogakāya* as the Buddha in regal attire, crown, ornaments owes its inspiration to such beginnings. See Snellgrove, *Image*, p. 138.

¹⁸ The majority of the cosmic Buddhas display cosmic scenes on the dress and not on the body. An exception is the Cosmic Buddha in the Avery Brundage Collection in the Asian Art Museum of San Francisco, which dates to the Liao Dynasty (907–1125 A.D.); see A. Howard, *Cosmological Buddha*, Pl. 53. Here part of the cosmos is depicted on the robe and part on the Buddha's chest. But in the majority of icons, the robe(s) functions as a frame beyond which the cosmological scenes do not extend. It is therefore incorrect to equate the robe with the body it covers, as does Howard, *Cosmological Buddha*, p. 61. This misapprehension leads Howard to consider the Viśvarūpa image in the Bhagavad Gītā as a possible influence in the iconography of these Central and East Asian cosmological Buddhas of the post-Gupta periods. Howard concludes that the Gītā's Viśvarūpa is composed of two elements: a multi-headed, multi-armed image, and, an image generating the forms that are in his body. According to Howard, the Hindus chose the first alternative to represent the cosmic god and the Buddhists chose the second. Unfortunately this reasoning does not take the full Hindu picture into consideration. Early Hindu Viśvarūpa images show both multiple limbs and emanating forms. See Sara L. Schastok, *The Śāmalāji Sculptures and 6th Century Art in Western India*, Leiden, 1985, Pls. XVI–XXIV; T.S. Maxwell, "Transformational Aspects of Hindu Myths and Iconology", *AARP* 4, London, 1973; "The Deogarh Viśvarūpa: A Structural Analysis", *AARP* 8. Further, this line of reasoning would need to explain why the Gītā, so influential in India in stimulating Hindu art (See Chapter 21, pp. 315–316), would be influential in stimulating Buddhist art in Central and Eastern Asia and not in India. I find this particularly difficult to believe because the same workshops in Mathurā that were responding to the Gītā's imagery when fashioning Hindu art, were also commissioned to fashion Buddhist art. Howard argues that the Buddha's body is a vessel of phenomenal forms which he generates (*Cosmological Buddha*, p. 113; re: her

B *The Jinas*

The earliest Jinas, crafted solely in Mathurā,¹⁹ also do not exhibit multiple bodily parts. As the Buddha images, they are examples which prove the rule.

A Jina is a spiritual victor, or conqueror. The appellation "Tīrthaṅkara" (Ford-maker), likewise alludes to the spiritually perfected being worshipped in Jainism. These beings are regarded as "perfect men" and "not heavenly gods".²⁰ The notion of a cosmic progenitor is alien to their perfection. This must be one reason why Jinas are not associated with the multiplicity convention in the Kuṣāṇa art of Mathurā.

The epithets given to Jaina perfected beings in the early Jaina literature demonstrate that they were worshipped as deities because of their blemishless state and their attainment of enlightenment, and not because of a god-like nature.²¹ Indeed, specific qualities of a Jina do not include miraculous or creative powers; they include the qualities of purity, omniscience and asceticism.²² According to the canonical tradition, Vardhamāna received the epithet Mahāvīra in recognition of the fortitude and steadfastness with which he performed austerities.²³ Were the multiplicity convention bestowed upon an extraordinary being because of his earthly heroism or spiritual conquest (i.e. the quality of *vīra*-hood), then Vardhamāna, like Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa would have been so endowed. But a *vīra* nature, by itself, is not the prime consideration for associating a supra-normal being with the multiplicity convention.

The Jainas developed their own iconographic language to express the purity, austerity and omniscience of their perfected beings. The Jaina Sarvatobhadra image, featuring four nude Jinas, facing outward on each of the four sides of an upright, is one expression of the perfection achieved by these supra-normal beings (Pl. 22.1).²⁴ There is no point in reiterating the doctrinal details which establish that nudity is symbolic of purity achieved

second Viśvarūpa image in the Gītā). Her principal evidence for the early depiction of this tenet is the Gandhāran Mohammed Nari Stele in the Lahore Museum for it contains two groups of figures in the upper right and left corners which show eight small Buddhas radiating around a central figure (See Plates 33 & 34 in *Cosmological Buddha*). While the overall interpretation of this stele remains unsolved (see the most recent attempt by J.C. Huntington, "A Gandhāran Image of Amitāyus' Sukhavati", *Annali* Vol. 40, 1980, 651–672, and its critique by Gregory Schopen, "The Inscription on the Kuṣāṇ Image of Amitābha and the Character of the Early Mahāyāna in India", *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* Vol. 10.2, 1987, pp. 130–131, fn. 50), I do not note a criticism of Huntington's position that the radiating figures are meditative reflections or mental projections (See also M. Taddei, "Non-Buddhist Deities in Gandhāran Art – Some New Evidence", *Investigating Indian Art*, pp. 352–353; Taddei publishes examples of non-Buddhist and Buddhist forms radiating about a Bodhisattva). If this is so then the Gandhāran reliefs do not reflect the idea that the Buddha or Bodhisattva is a being pregnant with forms that can be generated. Accordingly, that argument of Howard's also cannot be endorsed.

¹⁹ See N.P. Joshi, "Early Jaina Icons from Mathurā", *Mathurā: The Cultural Heritage*, pp. 332ff. and fn. 1.

²⁰ D.D. Malvania, "The Jaina Concept of the Deity", in *Aspects of Jaina Art and Architecture*, U.P. Shah and M.A. Dhaky eds., Ahmedabad, 1975, p. 2.

²¹ See Malvania "The Jaina Concept of Deity", p. 2, on such epithets as: *Arahanta*, *bhagavā*, *Aria*, *muni*, *Vīra*, *Mahāvīra*, *Buddha*.

²² Cf. Malvania, "Jaina Concept of Deity", p. 3.

²³ P.S. Jaini, *The Jaina Path of Purification*, New Delhi, 1979, p. 9, fn. 14.

²⁴ See N.P. Joshi, "Jaina Icons", pp. 353–354 for a survey of this type of image. See also Chapter 18, p. 253 for a discussion on the symbolism.

by means of asceticism. It is likewise hardly necessary to specify a point made many times in this work, namely that facing in the four directions is idiomatic of omniscience and omnipresence from the Vedic tradition onwards. Indeed, it is so pervasive a symbol, that it can be considered a pan-Indic symbol from as early as the Śunga period (e.g. Pls. 15.1, 2; 16.16).²⁵ The standing, totally static, posture of each Jina in the Sarvatobhadra image also expresses the accepted mode for showing the perfections of "omniscient awareness and complete nonvolition".²⁶ It is somewhat misleading to label a Sarvatobhadra image as a multiformed Jina image. It is not. No single Jina form has multiple bodily parts. Nor, for that matter, are the four forms multiples of one Jina; generally four different Jinās are represented.²⁷ How easy it would have been to attribute the notion of omniscience to a Jina by showing him with four heads, each literally facing in one of the four directions. That it was not done when it could, technically, be done (cf. Pl. 19.5), says a lot. It implies that Jainas kept their distance from the convention. Their aloofness is most evident in those images which feature the major god, a Jina, represented as a perfected being, who is surrounded by Brahmanic acolytes with the multiplicity convention (Pls. 1.1; 18.3). I can only suppose that Mathurā artisans and devotees alike understood that the multiplicity convention, or let us say, multiple heads in this case, was infused with sensibilities that went quite beyond the notion of "omniscience". I can only suppose that these sensibilities responded to the prime symbolism which I believe the convention conveyed, namely cosmic creativity. "The theory of the creation of the world is rejected in Jaina canonical works, so the deity of the Jainas is not the creator of the Universe and he is not worshipped on that account".²⁸

C

Brahmā

The case of Brahmā is more complicated than either that of the Buddha or the Jina. The cognizance of Brahmā is his four heads, piled high with the matted locks of an ascetic. However, around the time when his earliest images appear (early Gupta period), Brahmā is not systematically granted the status of a cosmic creator. The emphasis is on the word "systematically". For sporadic signs do exist: in some passages of the Mahābhārata, Brahmā appears as the Highest god;²⁹ one addorsed figure of Brahmā (described below) may have been the principal icon in a temple, and, two temples dedicated to him alone do exist.³⁰ But Brahmā is not a supreme god in ancient Hinduism and he never achieved that status in Hinduism, since there is not a separate cult devoted to this god, as the Supreme.

²⁵ See D.M. Srinivasan, "Caturvyūha and Variant Forms", 47.

²⁶ Jaini, *Jaina Path*, p. 192.

²⁷ N.P. Joshi, "Jaina Icons", p. 353.

²⁸ Malavania, "Jaina Concept of Deity", p. 4.

²⁹ J. Gonda, *Die Religionen Indiens I*, Stuttgart, 1960, p. 263.

³⁰ Gonda, *Religionen Indiens I*, p. 264, fn. 7.

Brahmā is however a demiurge. Already in the later sections of the Rāmāyaṇa, Brahmā is subordinate to the cosmic creator Viṣṇu, whose active agent of creation he becomes. The Gupta imagery at Deogarh showing Brahmā, seated on a lotus, arising out of the navel of Viṣṇu (Pl. 1.2), is the visual expression of an account in the Mahābhārata.³¹ Here Viṣṇu is Supreme, the cosmic creator out of whose belly the world stuff proceeds. We may say that Viṣṇu represents cosmic creative power and that Brahmā, first to arise, represents the creative agent who is the one to actually create the phenomenal world. In this way, Brahmā is a demiurge but, being himself created by a higher force, he is not the cosmic creator. The situation recalls the division between active and passive creativity established as far back as the Atharva Veda. In the hymns to Skambha, it is Skambha (lit. prop, central pillar etc.) who is the passive, generative, and supreme, source of creation, while Prajāpati is the activator, the subsequent creative agent.³² With respect to this theme, the continuities from ancient Hinduism to Hinduism proper are almost transparent, for Viṣṇu comes to be associated with the cosmic center, the axis mundi,³³ and Brahmā with Prajāpati, as well as with other Vedic progenitors.³⁴ From his inception, as the personification of the neuter Brahman, Brahmā is a progenitor. For that reason alone, the appearance of multiple bodily parts with Brahmā does not seem to be an outright contradiction of the rule.

There are other reasons as well. Most of the earliest Brahmā images show multiplication of one body part alone, the head.³⁵ The significance of tetracephalic Brahmā is so well established that it becomes formulaic by the time of the purāṇas. The Liṅga Purāṇa runs the concepts together in referring to the "... omniscient four-faced Brahmā".³⁶ Even when a more lustful reason for the four heads is presented in a purāṇa,³⁷ the correlation between the four heads and the ability to see in the four directions (with its concomitant all-seeing capability) remains stable. For us, the most interesting aspect of this significance is that Jains avoided using four heads to symbolize "omniscience" while Hindus did not. I am inclined to believe that the reason behind the discreet usage is twofold. First, as maintained throughout this work, the multiplicity convention stems from the cultural domain and world view of ancient Hinduism; that is also the source for the rest of Brahmā's iconography (see below). Second, the convention was encrusted with a predominant association, anathema to Jains for images of their Jinas, but not so to the patrons/artisans of Brahmā images; that association, I maintain, is with cosmic creation. Therefore it may not be so exceptional that the omniscience of a Hindu progenitor is designated by giving him four heads.

³¹ Mhbh. 3.194.10-12; note, Gonda, *Religionen Indiens* I, p. 264, also cites Rāmāy, 7.104.

³² See Chapter 3, pp. 36ff.

³³ Chapter 2, pp. 29-30 and fn. 25.

³⁴ Gonda, *Religionen Indiens* I, p. 263.

³⁵ There are exceptions. Four-arms and four heads are seen on the Bhumara (in one of the candrasalas) and Aihole Brahmā images, and, the Indian Museum, Calcutta has a Brahmā with one head and two arms in a Gupta Anantaśayin image.

³⁶ See Cornelia Dimmitt and J.A.B. van Buitenen, *Classical Hindu Mythology*, Philadelphia, 1978, p. 200.

³⁷ See Dimmitt and van Buitenen, *Hindu Mythology*, pp. 34-35.

The rest of Brahmā's qualities are strongly derived from ancient Hinduism. Indeed, Brahmā's iconography is based on the model of the Brahmanic sage (*ṛṣi*), or, Brahmacārin; the two were equated in Brahmanic literature.³⁸ A fourth century A.D. tetracephalic figure of Brahmā exemplifies the model rather well. This is the heretofore unpublished Brahmā from Māṇḍhal (Pl. 22.2). Māṇḍhal is a village 75 kilometers southeast of Nagpur. Excavations carried out by Nagpur University brought to light numerous Brahmanic sculptures, including the impressive two-armed Brahmā seated on a lotus. The image accords well with descriptions of the god in the *Bṛhat Saṃhitā*. The text states that the four-faced Brahmā is seated on a lotus and holds the ritual water vessel (LVII.41). The antelope skin he carries on the shoulder is also mentioned in Kāśyapa's commentary (cited by Utpala), along with other characteristics of Brahmā in the guise of a Brahmacārin.³⁹ Presence of the *yajñopavīta*, a dhotī secured by a rope-like girdle, absence of earrings as well as other ornamentations are also in accordance with the model of the Brahmanic ascetic. The model of the Brahmanic ascetic is equally noticeable in another fourth century A.D. seated Brahmā from a Śiva temple at Māḍugula (A.P.). The two-armed, four-faced god has no ornamentation, save some beads (?) around the neck and he holds the rosary in his right hand.⁴⁰

Several other Gupta images of Brahmā are known to me. They are not now complete figures, although I cannot think of a theological reason why, originally, they would not have been. An impressive image of Brahmā, formerly from Spinks, and now in a private collection, has four heads each of which is bearded.⁴¹ The heads are attached to addorsed bodies making this rendering of Brahmā distinctively different from the others. Three heads are attached to the frontal body and the fourth head joins the rear body. Each body has two arms. The sculpture has been adequately analyzed by Pal who dates it to the fourth century. I would agree with him that this addorsed Brahmā was very likely an image worshipped by circumambulation, wherefore the two bodies back-to-back were sculpted.⁴² Pal suggests that it may have been the principal icon in a temple dedicated to Brahmā. Its provenance is unknown. Three other Gupta heads of Brahmā can be cited; they seem to be somewhat later than the fourth century addorsed Brahmā. Two, probably of the fifth century, are in the Mathura Museum (Nos. 3376 and 48.3433; Pl. 22.3); another which can be dated to the sixth century is in the Indian Museum (No. A 25110/NS 3730). All these pieces are two-armed.

In the periods under review, Brahmā is the only deity whose multiplication of bodily parts is restricted to four heads. It must be remembered that the theoretical model for all *śaiva* icons with multiple heads is the *pañcamukha*, or, five heads. This is not the case with

³⁸ A learned man (i.e. a man versed in the Vedas), says the *Taittirīya Saṃhitā* (VI.6.1.4), is a Brahman, a *ṛṣi*, and sprung from *ṛṣis*.

³⁹ A.M. Shastri, *India as Seen in the Bṛhatsaṃhitā of Varāhamihira*, Delhi, 1969, p. 126.

⁴⁰ See C. Sivaramamurti, *Early Andhra Art and Iconography*, Hyderabad 1979, Fig. 52. Sivaramamurti does not mention the necklace which seems to be there, although the photograph is poor.

⁴¹ See P. Pal, "An Addorsed Śaiva Image from Kashmir and its Cultural Significance", *Art International* Vol. 24, Jan.-Feb. 1981, Figs. 27 & 28.

⁴² Pal, "Addorsed Śaiva Image", 52.

Brahmā. The few *vaiṣṇava* icons which have four heads have more than two arms (without being addorsed images). These are the Caturvyūha icons. Both the Pañcamukha and the Caturvyūha icons express far more complex theological statements than do Brahmā's four heads. In both the Pañcamukha and Caturvyūha images, the plastic expressions of these statements are the result of a layering of symbols based on the considerable range of notions associated with the number "four" and "heads" and "arms". Again, in the images of Brahmā, layering of symbols does not appear to be operating. The significance of Brahmā's four faces is no different from its earliest significance, in the Rig Veda, where "four-faces" alludes to Agni's omniscience.

Perhaps the best way to decipher the usage of the multiplicity convention with Brahmā is to allow that it neither quite supports nor denies the rule. Here is why: 1) Brahmā is a creator god, no doubt. On a rare occasion, he is even the High god. But he cannot be counted among Hinduism's great cosmic divinities. 2) Brahmā's iconography reflects the milieu wherefrom originated the multiplicity convention. 3) The significance of Brahmā's four heads originates from the same milieu, namely ancient Hinduism. 4) There is no evidence in Brahmā's imagery for the intensification of the multiplicity convention or for the layering of symbolic values, as occurs in the use and significance of the convention with the great cosmic gods of Hinduism. 5) There is an intriguing bit of iconographic evidence to show that Brahmā, too, may have been touched by the Pregnant Male concept; the pot-belly which V.S. Agrawala considers one of the distinctive features of a Gupta Brahmā image (along with four faces and matted locks),⁴³ is nothing other than the filled belly, symbolic of the fruitful womb. This feature raises the possibility that Brahmā may have inherited the distinctive *pūrṇakumbha* shape belonging to the Yakṣa in art, and to Prajāpati in Vedism.

D

Ṣaṣṭhī and Skanda/Kārttikeya

Ṣaṣṭhī is a minor goddess far removed from cosmic creation. She is an auspicious deity who becomes the guardian of children both during pregnancy and after their birth. Her name, Ṣaṣṭhī, is in recognition of the fact that she receives worship on the sixth day after the birth of the child. Ṣaṣṭhī is closely allied with Skanda/Kārttikeya, and both are closely associated with the number "six".⁴⁴

Skanda/Kārttikeya has six heads. He is said to be the son of the six Kṛttikā Mothers, or the constellation of Pleiades which has six stars. The name "Kārttikeya" shows, of course, his parentage. All the Kṛttikās wished to nurse the babe, so goes the story,⁴⁵ and the god's six heads developed so that he could suckle the breasts of all of them. Skanda/Kārttikeya and Ṣaṣṭhī are both worshipped on the sixth day of the lunar month.

⁴³ V.S. Agrawala, *Indian Art*, p. 254; Pl. L, Fig. 169.

⁴⁴ V.S. Agrawala, *Ancient Indian Folk Cults*, Varanasi, 1970, p. 90.

⁴⁵ See A.K. Chatterjee, *The Cult of Skanda-Kārttikeya in Ancient India*, Calcutta, 1970, pp. 10-12.

Śaṣṭhī also has six heads. The earliest depiction of her six heads occurs on the obverse of a Yaudheya coin series. She is two-armed and her heads are arranged in tiers: three heads in two tiers (Pl. 22.4). On the reverse, the same schema is used to portray the six heads of the god Skanda/Kārttikeya who holds a spear in his left hand. This coin series, first discussed by V.S. Agrawala, in connection with the iconography of Śaṣṭhī and Skanda/Kārttikeya,⁴⁶ has a twofold importance. It illustrates a connection between these two gods and their similar six-headedness.

For some reason, needing more study, Skanda/Kārttikeya is not shown with six heads in Kuṣāṇa art. He has one head and the normal number of hands in Kuṣāṇa art. It is not clear to me whether the two names of the god refer to these two different types of representations. From what has been said above, six heads are suitable for Kārttikeya. But what about Skanda? Are six heads also suitable for Skanda? To show the unclarified relationship between these two appellations (i.e. Skanda and Kārttikeya), I have separated them by a slash; it is used to suggest that an “either”/“or” situation may be involved. That is, perhaps some features are only symptomatic of Skanda, others only of Kārttikeya. For the same reason, throughout this work, reference to Saṃkarṣaṇa/Balarāma is also made with a slash.

The six heads of Śaṣṭhī are represented in a variety of ways in Kuṣāṇa art. An analysis of Kuṣāṇa Śaṣṭhī reliefs has been recently published by Dr. Herbert Härtel.⁴⁷ This work should be consulted for an overview of the goddess’ iconography. The ensuing focus is solely on her multiple heads and whether or not they suit or fall short of the theories established here.

Out of the fifteen known Kuṣāṇa representations of Śaṣṭhī from Mathurā, eight reliefs show the goddess with six heads. The central figure with its head may be surrounded by five additional heads, or, by five additional female torsos, or, by a combination of the two.⁴⁸ There seems to be no conceptual difference between these various ways to express her six-headedness.⁴⁹

⁴⁶ V.S. Agrawala, “Goddess Shashṭhī on the Yaudheya Coins”, *JNSI* Vol. V, 1943, pp. 29–32.

⁴⁷ Herbert Härtel, “Die Kuṣāṇa-Göttin Śaṣṭhī”, *Hinduismus und Buddhismus. Festschrift für Ulrich Schneider*, H. Falk ed. Freiburg, 1987, pp. 152–162.

⁴⁸ Six of the reliefs are illustrated in Härtel, “Śaṣṭhī”, Figs. 1–6. Two are illustrated in R.C. Agrawala, “Goddess Śaṣṭhī in Mathurā Sculptures”, *Bull. of Mus. & Archaeo. in U.P.*, No. 4, 1969, Figs. 1–2.

⁴⁹ Härtel, “Śaṣṭhī”, p. 158. This is not the position of T.S. Maxwell, *Viśvarūpa*, Delhi, 1988, pp. 35–43. He concentrates on one of the fifteen stone reliefs (Mathura Museum No. F 2) and concludes that it represents four aspects of Śaktī related to the four Caturvyūha gods, plus two more Śaktīs corresponding to Pañcarātra theology especially as given in the *Lakṣmī-tantra*. This interpretation is constructed mainly on the presence of a tree on the back of No. F 2 as well as on the back of Nos. 392–5, the Caturvyūha icon. It happens to be the same type of Aśoka tree, but Maxwell concentrates less on the similarity of species than on the bifurcation of branches that is there on both reliefs. It is maintained that the branches are behind emanations carved on the front. Numerous problems arise from his methodology. First, an Aśoka tree appears on the reverse of reliefs of deities that do not emit emanations (Kuvera, Tīrthaṅkaras, a Yakṣī; see N.P. Joshi, “Jaina Icons”, p. 349). Second, bifurcation of branches of a pipal tree is seen, for example, on the reverse of the recently published Buddha, dated in the year 8 of Kanīṣka; see Fussman, “Documents Epigraphiques Kouchans (V)”, Planche III; another instance where bifurcation is not associated with emanation. These two situations show that it is hazardous to base religious interpretations on the way a tree is depicted on the reverse of an image. (Also, a tree is the wrong analogy for the manifestations of a divine; see Chapter 19, fn. 67). There are additional problems. Maxwell arrives at an interpretation for one relief (No. F 2), which he has taken out of

A collection of twenty-nine multi-headed terracotta figurines from a Gupta stratum at Ahichchhatra have been identified as Śaṣṭhī figures by V.S. Agrawala.⁵⁰ Their clay medium, different from the Mathurā stone reliefs, may account for some of the "folk" quality of the Ahichchhatra forms. Also the arrangement of the multiple heads is different in the Mathurā and Ahichchhatra pieces. The latter show three heads in the front (Pl. 22.5), and sometimes three heads on the reverse. In those instances where the reverse heads are absent, Agrawala opines that they were not made because they were not seen.⁵¹ I am inclined to accept Agrawala's identification of the Ahichchhatra terracottas. First, the division of heads into two groups of three recalls the Yaudheya coins, although the heads on the coins are in two superimposed groups. Second, it does not seem improbable that a goddess of childbirth and children could inspire the production of a large number of terracottas in a sort of folk style.

The rationale for Śaṣṭhī's six heads is not problematic. Owing however to previous erroneous identification of some of her images, it has not as yet been forcefully advanced. Some of the images now identified as Śaṣṭhī used to be identified as a Nāginī, or, a Queen of Nāgas. The identification resulted from a misreading of the five forms around the central head. They were considered snake hoods instead of female heads etc. The six heads of Śaṣṭhī relate to her nature and especially her time of worship, as noted above. Śaṣṭhī is not a cosmic creator and her six heads are unrelated to creation. "Six" in the case of Śaṣṭhī is used to recall an actual number associated with the worship of the goddess. "Six" as has already been noted, is not a number functioning on a symbolic level,⁵² and this is again borne out in the case of Śaṣṭhī.⁵³ In Śaṣṭhī's iconography as in the case of Kārttikeya, "six" functions as an arithmetical number.

Śaṣṭhī with her six heads is an exception which proves the rule.

the series of six-headed females; but, he does not indicate whether his interpretation is to be applied to the other reliefs. If it is not, there ought to be some explanation on why not. Lastly, the Pañcarātra theory is taken from the c. 9th century text, the *Lakṣmī-tantra*, whose geographical area of influence is not given. How ideas expressed in a 9th century text of undetermined locality would have found their expression also in one c. 2nd century sculpture from Mathurā is another question for which no explanation is given.

⁵⁰ V.S. Agrawala, "Terracotta Figurines of Ahichchhatra, Dist. Bareilly, U.P.", *Ancient India* No. 4, 1947-48, p. 171.

⁵¹ On c. 2nd century B.C. Ujjain coins (Class 2; Var. 1. in J. Allan, *Catalogue of the Coins of Ancient India*, Reprint, 1975, New Delhi; p. cxliii) six-headed Skanda/Kārttikeya is shown in the same manner. Three heads are seen in front, and the three in back are "naturally not represented". There is little to suggest that the figure could represent five-headed Maheśa. True, the figure could be compared to the frontal view of the fragmentary Mathurā Maheśa of the Kuṣāṇa period (Pl. 19.6). However, it should not be forgotten that Ujjain coins can already depict diagnostic symbols, such as the Liṅga (see Chapter 17, p. 222), and on Var. 1 type coins, a club or spear characteristic of Skanda/Kārttikeya.

⁵² See Chapter 20, pp. 293-294.

⁵³ On the numerical implication for Skanda/Kārttikeya's six heads, appearing from Gupta times onwards, cf. A.K. Chatterjee, *Skanda-Kārttikeya*, p. 119. The three heads of Gaṅgā in the Elephanta scene of Gaṅgādhara also express an arithmetic idea, namely that the river flows and purifies three regions, heaven, earth and the lower regions (Cf. C. Sivaramamurti, *Some Aspects of Indian Culture*, New Delhi, 1969, pp. 20-21). Her depiction at Elephanta reminds that Gaṅgā's epithet in the Mahābhārata is *tripathagā*.

E

Samkarṣaṇa/Balarāma

Sometimes Samkarṣaṇa/Balarāma is shown with four arms. Such representations usually occur in the Kuṣāṇa kinship triads. Three out of five Vṛṣṇi kinship triads, or fragments thereof preserving his figure, show the god with four arms (e.g. Pl. 16.5). These triads originate from Mathurā. In each case, Samkarṣaṇa/Balarāma is portrayed with the trappings of a deified Vṛṣṇi Hero. He holds in his extra hands his distinctive attributes: the massive club or pestle and the plough surmounted by a lion. In all the examples, whether he is two-armed or four-armed, Samkarṣaṇa/Balarāma occupies the position of elder brother, while Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa occupies the position of younger brother. Yet, the latter is always four-armed while the number of arms of the elder brother vacillates.⁵⁴ To say it the other way round, there is no case where Samkarṣaṇa/Balarāma has more arms than Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa. In the Jaina triads, where the brothers assume the same hierarchical positions on either side of Tīrthaṅkara Neminātha, variations also occur. But here, the variations are shared. That is, either both brothers are two-armed⁵⁵ or four-armed.⁵⁶ In the Northwestern regions, the brothers are shown with the normal number of arms. It has been proposed that two-armed forms of Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa distinguish his human form from his four-armed form which is a divine form.⁵⁷ Perhaps the same notions govern the different representations of Samkarṣaṇa/Balarāma. But even this postulate is clouded.

Presumably, the *vyūha* Samkarṣaṇa/Balarāma, that is, the second of the four emanations from the Supreme godhead, is considered to be on a higher plane than Samkarṣaṇa/Balarāma, the deified Vṛṣṇi Hero. Yet he is two-armed in the *vyūha* representation⁵⁸ (see Pl. 18.18) and four-armed in some of the Vṛṣṇi kinship reliefs.

In the Gupta period, larger images of this god appear which, when four-armed, seem to combine his features in the kinship triads with his features in the *vyūha* icon.⁵⁹ A quick perusal through N.P. Joshi's monograph on this god shows that the vacillation between four and two arms remains throughout the duration of the god's images. Why this should be so is unclear.

⁵⁴ In the two following examples Samkarṣaṇa/Balarāma is two-armed and Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa is four-armed: 1) the Mathurā relief now in the Karachi Museum, Pakistan; 2) the Gayā Dist. Triad (Patna Museum Nos. 11300 & 11299).

⁵⁵ Late Kuṣāṇa examples from Mathurā include Mathura Museum Nos. B 15; 34.2488. To the third-fourth century A.D. may be assigned J 117 and J 60 in the Lucknow Museum. These icons are described in D.M. Srinivasan, "Vaiṣṇava Art", p. 386.

⁵⁶ The Late Kuṣāṇa examples from Mathurā are Nos. S 758 and J 47. Of the third-fourth century are Nos. J 89, J 121, and Mathura Museum No. 2502. Mathura Museum No. 2856 may be Jaina, but more probably it is a Brahmanic Triad. These icons are described in Srinivasan, "Vaiṣṇava Art", pp. 386-387.

⁵⁷ See Chapter 18.

⁵⁸ This feature changes. Note the 7th century Nepalese Caturvyūha described in Chapter 18, p. 254, shows a four-armed Samkarṣaṇa/Balarāma. Also note that the Bṛhad-brahma-saṃhitā states that all four *vyūhas* possess four arms (see T.A.G. Rao, *Elements of Hindu Iconography*, Vol. I, Pt. I, pp. 236-237).

⁵⁹ Essentially, the natural hands recall the god's pose in the *vyūha* image, and the extra hands recall the attributes in the kinship images. See, for example, Mathura Museum No. C 19, described, along with other examples in Srinivasan, "Vaiṣṇava Art", p. 389.

Samkarṣaṇa/Balarāma is neither a creator god nor a cosmic divinity. There is also no myth to suggest a symbolic approach to his four-arms. It is hard to believe that at this stage in our knowledge of Samkarṣaṇa/Balarāma a solid understanding of the god has been attained. Too many basic questions and problems remain.⁶⁰ At this stage, his case represents an exception. He is a secondary deity with the multiplicity convention, whose symbolic significance cannot be determined. Samkarṣaṇa/Balarāma with his four arms in Kuṣāṇa art is an exception that disproves the rule. The only approach I can offer to explain the occasional use of the multiplicity convention with this god comes from the later text, the Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa, which states "Samkarṣaṇa should be made in the likeness of Vāsudeva".⁶¹

⁶⁰ In addition to the multiple arms and their significance, there is the need to determine why two distinct iconographic types are used for this god. Also the relationship between his two names is unclarified as is whether some iconographic characteristics stem from, or relate to, only one name or aspect of the god.

⁶¹ III.85.21.

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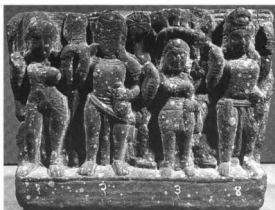
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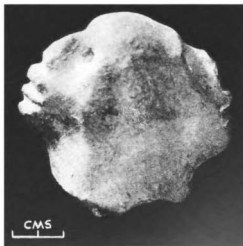
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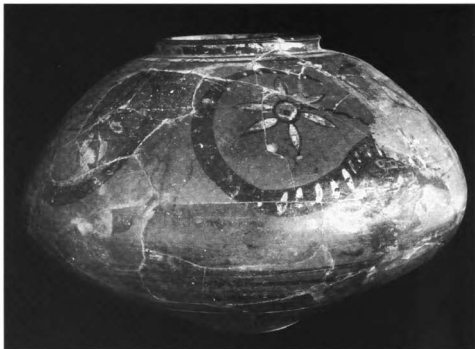
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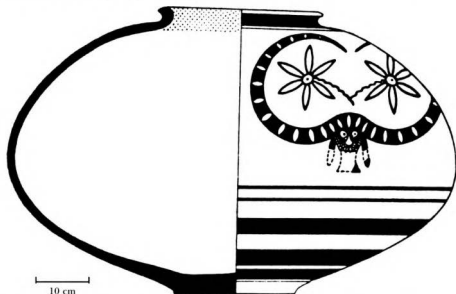
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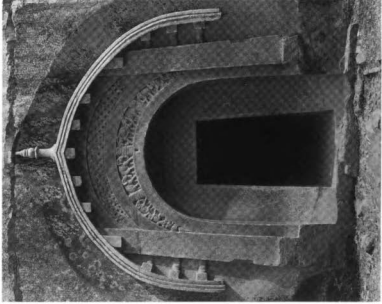
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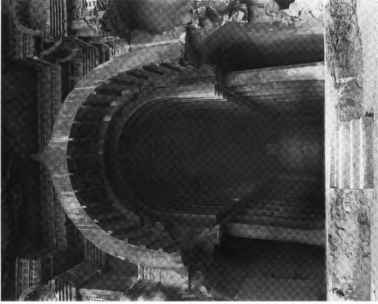
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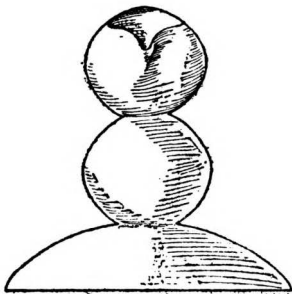
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Pl. 14.12. Anthropomorphic pot. Purana Qila, Delhi. Around the beginning of the Christian era. Photograph copyright of the Archaeological Survey of India.



Pl. 14.13. Anthropomorphic pot. Mathura. Around the beginning of the Christian era. Photograph copyright of the Archaeological Survey of India.



Pl. 14.14. Anthropomorphic pot. Mathura. Side view. Photograph copyright of the Archaeological Survey of India.



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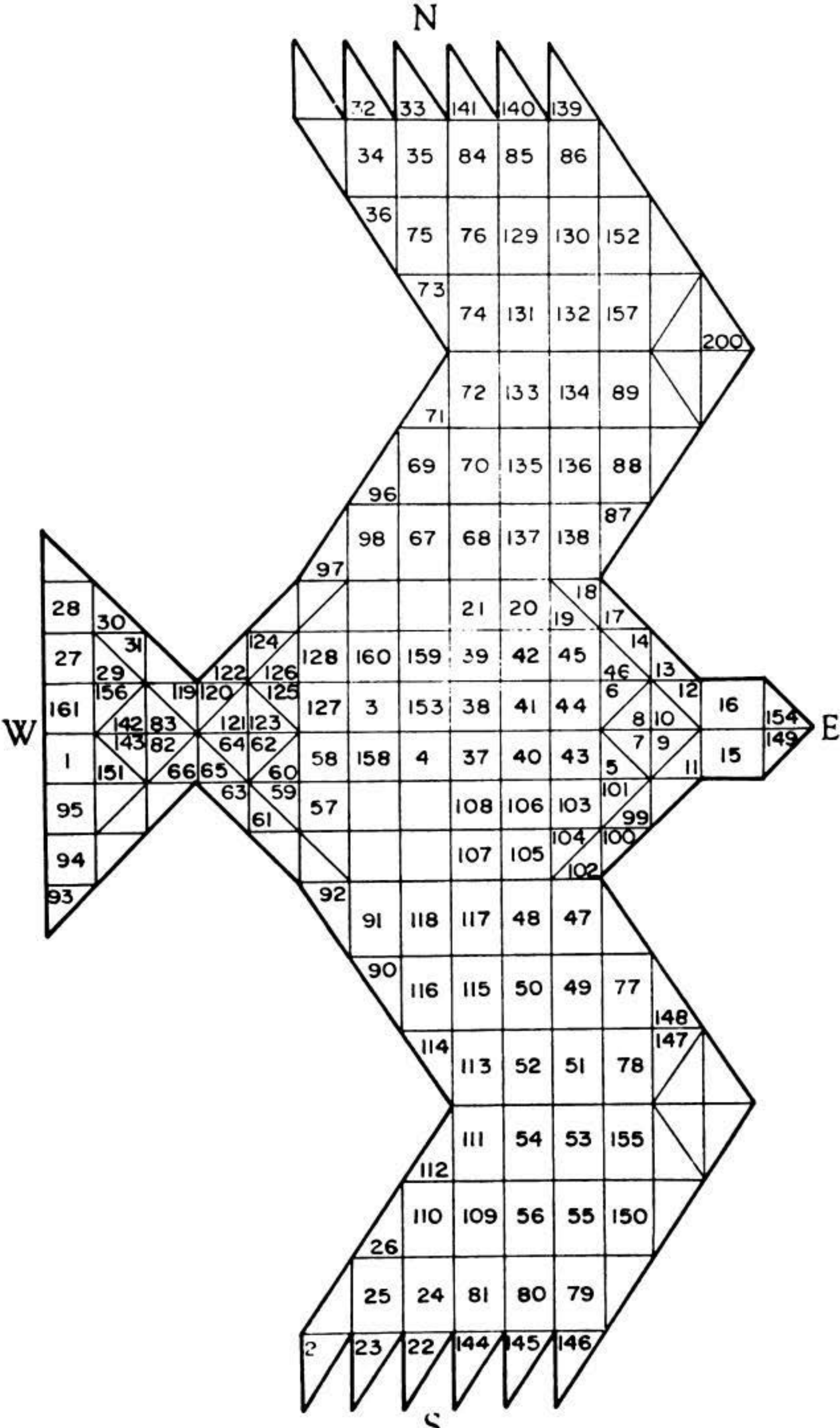


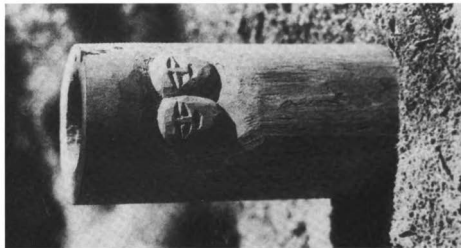
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Pl. 15.1. Proto-Caturvyūha image. Bhitā, Uttar Pradesh. ca. Second century B.C. State Museum, Lucknow (acc. no. 56.394). Photograph courtesy of the State Museum, Lucknow.



Pl. 15.2. Proto-Caturvyūha Image. Rear view. Photograph courtesy of the State Museum, Lucknow.



Pl. 15.3 Vaisnava image. Malhār, Madhya Pradesh. First century B.C. Photograph courtesy of Donald M. Stadtner.



Pl. 15.4. Yaksa. Noh, Rajasthan. Sunga period. Front view. Photograph courtesy of Frederick M. Asher.



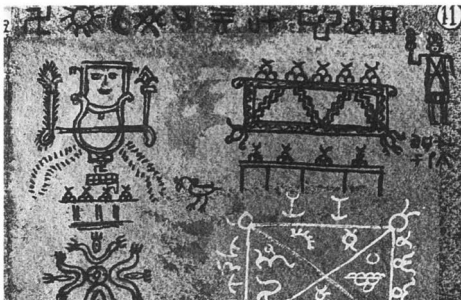
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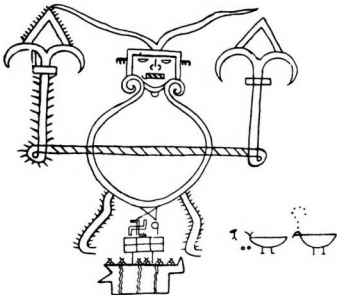
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Pl. 15.9. Kumbhodara Yaksha. Binaika, near Bharkhera, Madhya Pradesh. ca. Second century A.D. Photograph courtesy of K.D. Bajpai.



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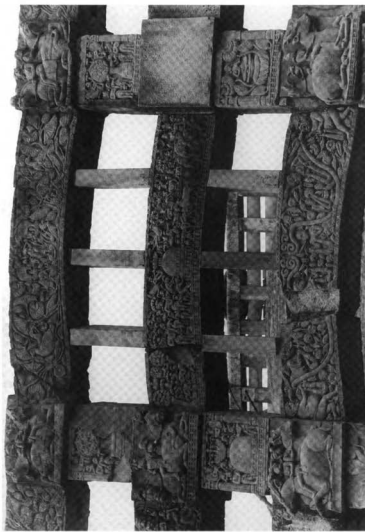
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Pl. 16.16. Proto-Caturvyūha image. Bhitā, Uttar Pradesh. ca. Second century B.C. State Museum, Lucknow (acc. no. 56-394). Photograph courtesy State Museum, Lucknow.



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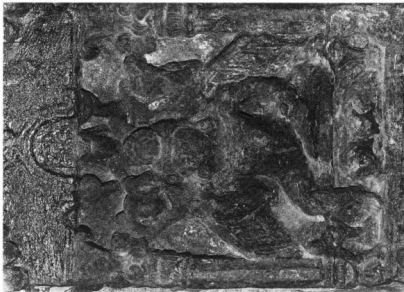
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Pl. 18.4. Weight stone. Mathura. Kuṣāna period. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, The Samuel Eilenberg Collection. Gift of Eilenberg, 1987 (acc. no. 1987.142.286). Photograph courtesy of the Metropolitan Museum of Art. All rights reserved. The Metropolitan Museum of Art.



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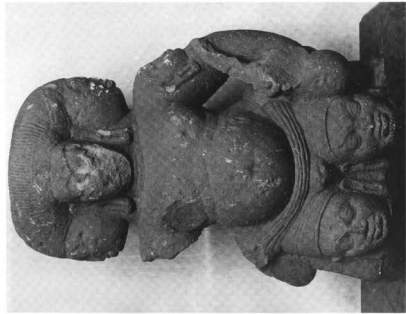
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Pl. 19.24. Śiva Astamūrti. Mandhāl. Rear view. Photograph courtesy of American Institute of Indian Studies.



Pl. 20.1. Warrior Goddess, Mathura, ca. Second century A.D. Museum für Indische Kunst, Berlin (acc. no. MIK I 5894). Photograph courtesy of Museum für Indische Kunst, Berlin.



Pl. 20.2. Warrior Goddess, Mathura, Kusāna period. Government Museum, Mathura (acc. no. 2317). Photograph, author.



Pl. 20.3. Warrior Goddess, Sonkh, Ksatrapa period. Museum für Indische Kunst, Berlin (acc. no. So I 215). Photograph courtesy of Museum für Indische Kunst, Berlin.



Pl. 20.4. Warrior Goddess, Sonkh, Kusāna period. Museum für Indische Kunst, Berlin (acc. no. So I 191). Photograph courtesy of Museum für Indische Kunst, Berlin.



Pl. 20.5. Warrior Goddess. Sonkh. Late Kusāna period. Museum für Indische Kunst, Berlin (acc. no. So I 143). Photograph courtesy of Museum für Indische Kunst, Berlin.



Pl. 20.7. The Goddess, probably as Ascetic. Mathura. Kusāna period. National Museum, New Delhi (acc. no. 67.38). Photograph courtesy of National Museum, New Delhi.



Pl. 20.6. Warrior Goddess. Mathura. Late Kusāna period. Government Museum, Mathura (acc. no. 2784). Photograph courtesy of Government Museum, Mathura.



Pl. 20.8. The Goddess, probably as Ascetic. Mathura. Kusāna period. Government Museum, Mathura (acc. no. 15.978). Photograph courtesy of Government Museum, Mathura.



Pl. 20.9. Warrior Goddess. Mathura. Kusāna period. Government Museum, Mathura (acc. no. 65.1). Photograph courtesy of Government Museum, Mathura.



Pl. 20.10. Seated Goddess. Gandhara. Kusāna period. Chandigarh Museum. Photograph courtesy of Warburg Institute, London.



Pl. 20.11. Warrior Goddess. Sonkh. Late Kusāna period. Museum für Indische Kunst (acc. no. So I 137). Photograph courtesy of Museum für Indische Kunst, Berlin.



Pl. 20.12. Warrior Goddess. Mathura. Kusāna period. Staatliches Museum für Völkerkunde, München (acc. no. Mu 199). Photograph courtesy of Staatliches Museum für Völkerkunde, München.



Pl. 20.13. Warrior Goddess. Sonkh. Late Kusāna period. Museum für Indische Kunst, Berlin (acc. no. So I 226). Photograph courtesy of Museum für Indische Kunst, Berlin.



Pl. 20.14. Warrior Goddess. Sonkh. Kusāna period. Museum für Indische Kunst (acc. no. So I 214). Photograph courtesy of Museum für Indische Kunst, Berlin.



Pl. 20.15. Warrior Goddess. Mathura. Kusāna period. State Museum, Lucknow (acc. no. G332). Photograph courtesy of State Museum, Lucknow.



Pl. 20.16. Warrior Goddess. Mathura. Late Kusāna period. Stone. Los Angeles County Museum of Art (acc. no. M. 84.153.1). Gift of Dr. and Mrs. P. Pal. H: 9 1/2" W: 5 5/8" D: 1 3/4". Photograph courtesy of Los Angeles County Museum of Art.



Pl. 20.17. Warrior Goddess. Mathura. Kusāna period. Government Museum, Mathura (acc. no. 2715). Photograph courtesy of Government Museum, Mathura.



Pl. 20.18. Warrior Goddess. Mathura. Late Kusāna period. Museum für Indische Kunst, Berlin (acc. no. MIK 15817). Photograph courtesy of Museum für Indische Kunst, Berlin.



Pl. 20.19. Warrior Goddess. Late Kusāna period. Museum für Indische Kunst, Berlin. Photograph courtesy of Professor Doctor Herbert Härtel.



Pl. 20.20. Warrior Goddess. Uttar Pradesh area. Late Kusāna period. Archaeological Survey of India, Northern Circle, Agra (acc. no. 56). Photograph courtesy of Archaeological Survey of India, Northern Circle, Agra.



Pl. 20.21. Warrior Goddess. Mathura, Kusāna period. Government Museum, Mathura (acc. no. 592). Photograph, author.



Pl. 20.22. Warrior Goddess. Mathura. Early Fourth century. The Russek Collection (no. 605 IMG). Photograph courtesy of The Russek Collection.



Pl. 20.23. Fragment of standing female figure. Mat. Kusana period. Front view. Government Museum, Mathura (acc. no. 214A). Photograph, author.



Pl. 20.24. Fragment of standing female figure. Mat. Rear view. Photograph courtesy of the Government Museum, Mathura.



Pl. 20.25. Warrior Goddess. Mathura. Late Kusāna period. Government Museum, Mathura (acc. no. 2947). Photograph courtesy of American Institute of Indian Studies.



Pl. 20.26. Mithras Slaying the Bull. Roman. Early third century A.D. Virginia Museum (acc. no. 67.58). Photograph courtesy of Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Richmond, VA. The Arthur and Margaret Glasgow Fund.



Pl. 20.27. Goddess. Gandhara. Kuṣāna period. Le Beau Collection, Switzerland. Photograph courtesy of Le Beau Collection.



Pl. 20.28. Armlet. Northwestern part of the subcontinent. Second century. Peshawar Museum. Photograph, author.



Pl. 21.1. Ekamukha Linga. Mathura (?). Kuṣāna period. Allahabad Museum (acc. no. 4702). Photograph courtesy of Allahabad Museum.



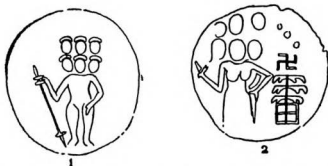
Pl. 22.1. Jain Sarvatobhadra image. Mathura. Kusāna period. Government Museum, Mathura (acc. no. B69). Photograph, author.



Pl. 22.2. Tetracephalic figure of Brahmā, Māndhal (near Nagpur). Fourth century. Nagpur University Museum. Photograph, author.



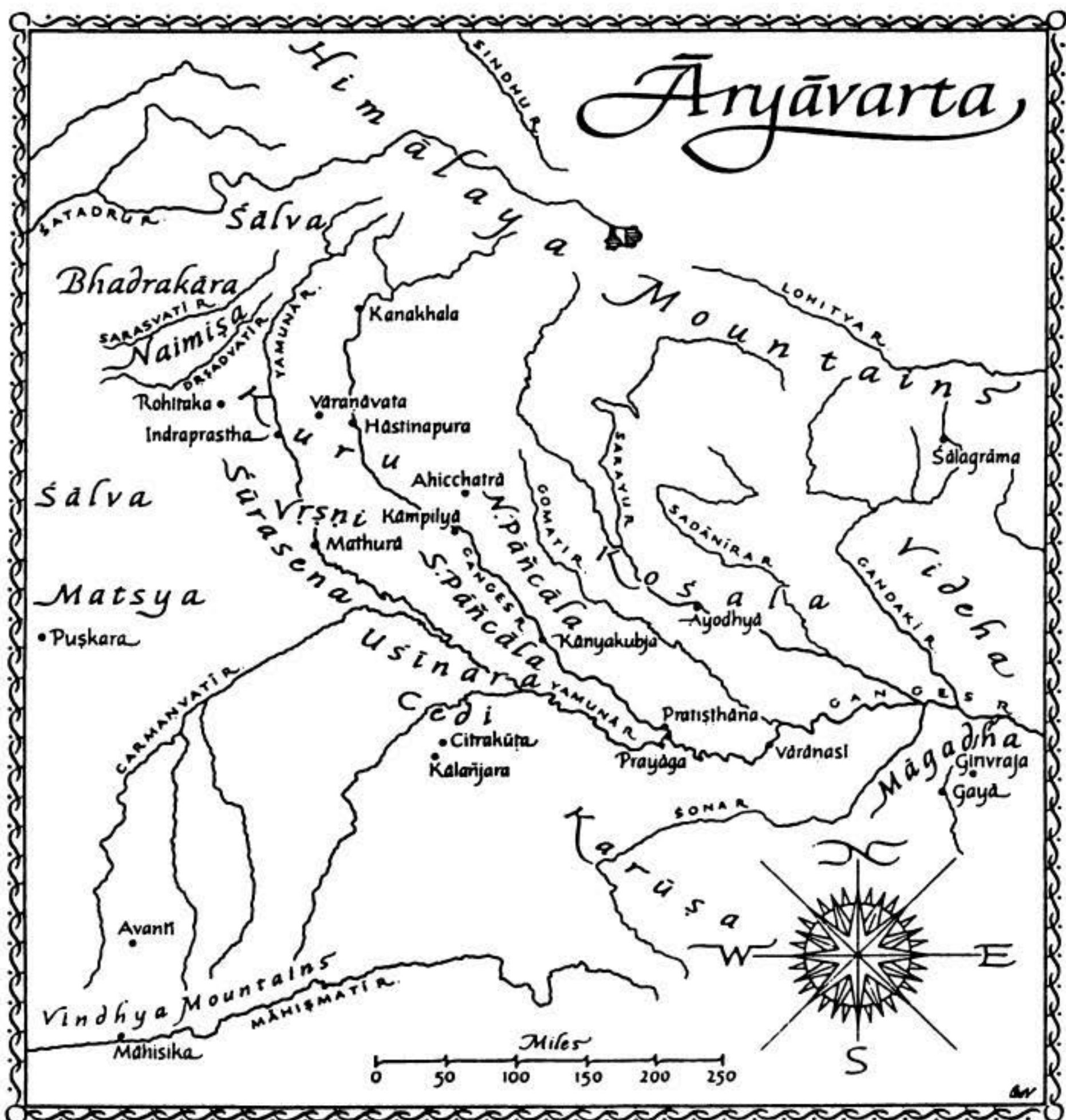
Pl. 22.3. Brahmā. Probably Mathura, ca. Fifth century. Government Museum, Mathura (acc. no. 48.3433). Photograph courtesy of American Institute of Indian Studies.



Pl. 22.4. Yaudheya coin showing the Goddess Sasthi on no. 2. Lucknow State Museum. Photograph from *Journal of the Numismatics Society of India*, Vol. V, Pt. I, June 1943.



Pl. 22.5. Goddess Sasthi. Ahichchhatra. Gupta period. State Museum, Lucknow (acc. no. 56.515). Photograph courtesy of State Museum, Lucknow.



Based on *The Historical Atlas of South Asia*, courtesy of Joseph Schwartzberg,
Department of Geography, The University of Minnesota.

Map A. Āryāvarta. Reproduced from J.A.B. van Buitenen, *The Mahābhārata*. Book 1. This map is based on *A Historical Atlas of South Asia*, originally published by the University of Chicago Press, 1978 and reissued, with new matter, by Oxford University Press, New York, 1992.

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